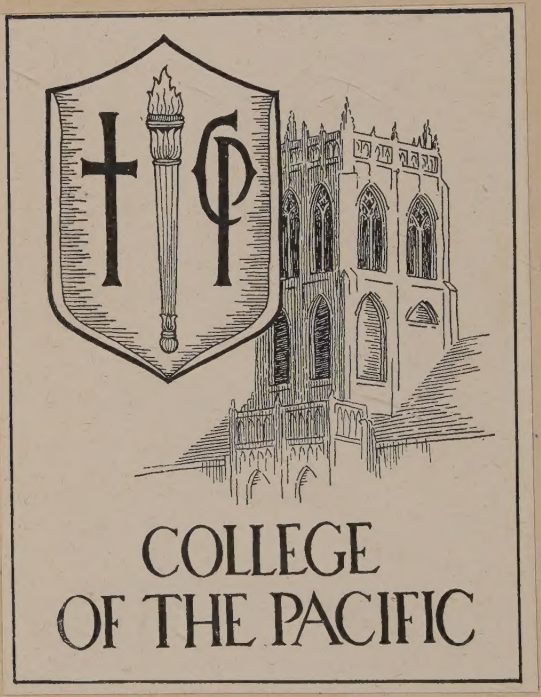
A NEW STUDY OF ENGLISH POETRY

HENRY NEWBOLT, M.A., D.Litt.


COLLEGE
OF THE PACIFIC

A NEW STUDY OF ENGLISH POETRY

BY

HENRY NEWBOLT, M.A., D.Litt.

NEW YORK

E. P. DUTTON & COMPANY

681 FIFTH AVENUE

Published, 1919

BY

E. P. DUTTON & COMPANY

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Printed in the United States of America

18-10396/1

Ten of these essays have appeared in the 'English Review' and one in the 'Fortnightly Review.' The Author thanks his editors for their hospitality.

PREFACE

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THE greater part of the twelve essays contained in this volume will be recognised by those who have attended the lectures of the Professor of Poetry at the Royal Society of Literature. One was originally delivered at Newcastle-on-Tyne as the Spence-Watson Memorial Lecture, another at University College, London, and a third before the English Association. To make them fitting parts of a book some alterations of a formal kind were necessary: but it was not possible, nor would it, I think, have been desirable, to avoid a certain amount of repetition. Logically, perhaps, it should be enough to state a principle once, and leave the reader to apply it for himself on each subsequent occasion. But this would involve a more prolonged effort than an author of to-day could venture to ask of his reader: it seemed, in every way but the way of logic, better to make each chapter complete in itself, and therefore intelligible even when read out of its order.

This course was also more consistent with the intention of the book, which, in spite of its professorial origin, claims only to be suggestive and not authoritative. Its whole argument is, in fact, against aca-

demic and scholastic authority. It appears entirely convincing to the writer, but only because it gives, so far as he can see, a scientific explanation of the facts concerning Poetry. Evidently Authority, if there be any such power, would need only to speak once and for all: but suggestion is a humbler form of persuasion and must be clear and persistent. Unfortunately it is also dangerous to be too clear or too persistent: and I have realized this so strongly that I fear to have done my beliefs less than justice. My chief feeling, in parting from the book, is one of anxiety lest I have stated them, vital and momentous as they seem to me, in too slight a form and with too little backing of argument and illustration.

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A NEW STUDY OF ENGLISH POETRY

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I

WHAT IS POETRY?

Much has been written about poetry—it has been treated as a part of the history of nations, as a chapter in the evolution of thought, as a series of biographical studies: or again as an art, and even as a craft or mystery. A broader survey has been made by those who from Aristotle downwards have considered it scientifically as a form of human activity: but they have too seldom carried their general principles into an examination of the poetry of a particular country or cycle. The result has been that the great mass of readers, probably willing enough to listen to any direct discussion of poems actually known to them or within their reach, have turned away from a mainly abstract inquiry and gone back to anecdotal lives of the poets or editions of their selected works. The general uncertainty as to the true nature of poetry has thus been continued, with what consequences we know. Poets have been at one time despised, at another almost deified, and again as unreasonably neg-

lected; and these violent alterations have been ascribed by the public to a change in the quality of the poetry produced, by the poets to an instability of feeling in those who should be their readers.

The Victorian Age was an age of confidence: it was succeeded by an age of confusion. The arts fell in market value, and poetry perhaps suffered more heavily than the rest. Writers who only forty years before would have been enthusiastically praised and followed, perhaps even lavishly rewarded, were completely neglected, or informed through the Press that they left their readers cold, that they were but Epigoni, the puny descendants of a great ancestry. Here and there a voice was even heard to ask whether poetry any longer existed among us. To-day there is a revival of interest, there is even enthusiasm: but the confusion continues, for the enthusiasm is met by solemn disapproval, or by charges of meretriciousness and degeneracy.

Such outcries, it is true, come rather from the skirts of the crowd than from any more central point of view; but they are none the less worth considering, because poetry claims to be every man's concern, to be a power whose centre is everywhere and its circumference nowhere. It does concern us vitally to know whether great poetry is still written and valued among us; whether it is still, as in the past, the effect and the cause of vigour in our national life; or whether, on the contrary, it lingers only as a plaything for the few, or perhaps as a kind of waste product thrown off by a machinery not yet completely

readjusted. It does concern us, if possible, to bring about recognition between the poets and the public.

It must be remembered that there have long been two opinions current about poetry. The favourable view will appear presently; but it has also been held by a large proportion of our fellow-countrymen that poetry is at best a more decorative form of speech, an elegance, a kind of ceremony appropriate to certain occasions, pleasing to certain temperaments, but always otiose and generally esoteric. At the worst, it is thought to be a sort of sugary nonsense, a mummery which impedes the progress of business, an obsolete form of sentimentality, the defeated but obstinate enemy of scientific truth. It is clear that if this is the right account, then the strongest and subtlest spirits among men have been the most subject to an unworthy delusion; the human lamp at its brightest has burned with a strangely smoky flame. But even so paradoxical a belief as that cannot be effectively refuted unless by an exposition which will account for it, which will go back to the beginning and find the underlying element of truth which has been so perverted. If we undertake this, we shall be asking once more a question which has been put and answered many times already; our justification will be that the answer which has satisfied one generation often fails to satisfy, or even to reach, another: that every age in turn desires to approach the matter in its own way and to be instructed or persuaded in its own vernacular. In the early days of the nineteenth century the language in use was that of Kant, of Cole-

ridge, or of Goethe; then succeeded a Darwinian phase, when evolution was the dialect of thought; at the present moment the terms and methods which will be most readily understood will probably be those of a Henri Bergson and of a Benedetto Croce.

What then is poetry? What is its value? Is it loved for its own sake or for its effects? What has it to do with Life? What is its relation to Science, and to the other Arts: to Religion and to Morality? Is the essential part of it the subject, the diction, the versification, or some peculiar quality of emotion? What distinguishes good poetry from bad? Is the highest poetry personal or impersonal, subjective or objective, the product of experience or invention? What are the possible forms of poetry, and is there any natural limitation of them?

These are some of the preliminary points in our inquiry. Let us begin it with the examination of a simple and generally familiar example. Let us imagine ourselves to be standing on a quiet September evening in a country churchyard, overlooking a characteristic stretch of English landscape. From our place behind the yew tree we can overhear the remarks of those who pass within a few yards of us along the churchyard path. "Hark! bell!" says a child to his mother as the curfew begins to sound, and he exclaims again as he catches sight of the herd of cows winding slowly back to the farm, and the ploughman plodding wearily towards the village. "Yes," replies the mother, "time you were in bed, my son." The farmer passes with his wife. He points

to his cattle. "Some good straight backs there," he says. She is looking at the old bent ploughman. "You can't say as much for poor Giles, but come, 'tis nearly dark." When they had gone there is but one figure left in the churchyard: we hear in the gathering dusk this fragment of monologue, murmured in a voice which seems almost a natural part of the solitude upon which those other voices had for a moment intruded:

> The curfew tolls the knell of parting day,
> The lowing herd winds slowly o'er the lea
> The ploughman homeward plods his weary way,
> And leaves the world to darkness and to me.

There is something different here; every man can feel that. What the other voices said we may forget, probably we have already forgotten; but the very words of this voice and the very tone of it we shall long remember. Yet the difference would appear, when you look into it, to be a very slight one. Each one of the speakers expressed the perception of certain facts; some of them heard the bell, some noticed the cattle, some saw the tired ploughman, some observed the approach of darkness. It is true that one only was conscious of all these impressions, though all the speakers were equally in a position to receive them. We are reminded, then, that an impression or sensation is something offered to us by the external world, which we may accept or not accept. There is no mere passivity in the matter. If an impression is really impressed upon us, if a sensation is really

felt, it is because by our activity of the spirit we seize upon it, and re-present it as an image, tacitly express it as an intuition, to our conscious self. This, when we are children, we very readily do, and there are some who always retain the childlike power of accepting impressions with simplicity. But this is not common; the course of practical life is against it. For æsthetic, for perception, most of us need what may be called re-education. For in later life, as Mr. Binyon has recently warned us in his *Flight of the Dragon*, "we guard ourselves against impressions, we entrench our minds in habits, we refuse simply to see with our eyes, to trust our senses, but must continually be referring to some external standard or other, which perhaps is not only not valid in itself, but has no real correspondence with our own intuitions."

I remember many years ago seeing a half-finished picture, in which the painter had represented a horse standing in a sunny meadow. The general colour of the horse was a bright bay; but in the picture there was a strong blue reflection upon its back and a strong green reflection under its belly. I went next day to the meadow myself, to see the painting continued, and was immediately convinced of a truth which my own æsthetic activity had never before presented to my consciousness. Some time afterwards a friend to whom I repeated the story told me that he had once been equally surprised to see a distinct green colour on the breast of a swallow flying low over grass. Until that moment he had always seen swallows with white

breasts, not because they did not often exhibit the green reflection, but because long habit had prevented him from seizing that unexpected variation in his intuition of a swallow.

Still, clearly or confusedly, we do create for ourselves certain experiences, we do seize certain impressions, and express them tacitly to ourselves. We go further, we utter or record them in words or otherwise; and it is to such utterance that we apply the word expression in its full sense of the externalisation of the tacit or inward expression.

Now, it is at this point, at the very first stage of human knowledge, that the common misconception begins as to the difference between poetry and prose, the relation between poetry and science. It is commonly taken for granted that our perceptions or intuitions of the material world are expressions of reality, expressions directly and accurately corresponding to things as they are in themselves. Science is supposed to treat of this reality, while Art deals only with a more or less garbled imitation of it. This dualistic theory is itself unscientific. The simple intuition, the child's inward expression of the sound of the bell, or the appearance of the cattle, is the basis both of art and science, the raw material both of poetry and prose. We cannot know things as they are; we can seize their appearances and represent them to our consciousness by our æsthetic activity; we can then go further and make comparisons, classes, generalisations, by our logical or scientific activity. The statement, or verbal expression, of the

first process will be, strictly speaking, poetry; of the second, prose. When the farmer compared his impression of one cow with that of another, in respect of a point of breeding, he was obviously speaking prose, making a scientific observation. His wife, and the child's mother, were similarly logical and prosaic; they had taken the raw material of perception, and given it out, not as a simple statement, an externalisation of the internal expression, but as worked up into a concept, an intellectual judgment. They had shown themselves, as we say, practical people, not mere creatures of instinct. The child had not; he had stopped short at the stage of art.

At this point we must make sure of our ground, we must carry no one with us unconvinced. Art, we have said, is simply expression: the act of the human spirit seizing upon a sensation and giving form to it. Poetry is the act of expressing an intuition in words. Is that to be taken as a literal statement? When a child tells himself that he hears a bell ringing is he an artist? When he proclaims his perception aloud is his speech poetry?

In a strictly limited sense, but in a fundamental sense, these propositions are true. Art, poetry, is common to the race; it is the natural activity of every man. When we express our intuitions in any medium, with the intention of simply expressing them and not of reasoning about them, we are all practising art; when we do it in words we are all making poetry. It is true that from the cry of "Hark! bell!" we have a long way to go before we come to an Elegy

by Gray or an Ode by Keats. And it is true that in general we only use the words "poem" or "work of art" of very complex and difficult feats of expression like these. Yet the difference is not so great after all between the child's crude elementary bit of expression and the simpler parts of these long and magnificent webs of interwoven feeling and thought. "The Curfew tolls"—is not the starting point the same, the first step identical? "My heart aches and a drowsy numbness pains my sense"—is not that a common experience, expressed as simply as we might ourselves express it? Is it not true then that the poet is not a being of alien birth, that his activity is not fundamentally unlike any activity of our own, but that on the contrary whenever we succeed in any expression of our feelings, our speech hath of itself the nature of poetry?

But we have not yet reached what we commonly mean by the word "poetry"; we have not yet made a poem; we have not done what Keats did when he wrote that "Ode to a Nightingale." What then was it that he did?

If we look at the poem analytically we shall see that it is in the first place the expression of two simultaneous intuitions—one of a bird singing, one of a feeling in the poet himself. For one moment he is happy, too happy, in the bird's happiness; he presents an image of it singing of summer in full-throated ease. Then he longs for a draught of vintage—of which again he presents a vivid image, with beaded bubbles winking at the brim, as well as

images of the scenes which it might recall—dance and Provençal song and sunburnt mirth—and this magic vintage he would drink that he might with the nightingale fade away into the forest dim, and escape his own misery, typical of the misery of man, which he presents by a series of abstractions, weariness, fever, fret, leaden-eyed despairs and pining love. He sets over against this the scene of the bird's life among the leaves, where tender is the night, where there is no light save what from heaven is with the breezes blown, but where in the embalmed darkness he can by a guess perceive the grass, the thicket and the fruit tree wild, the fast-fading violets and the coming musk-rose. The contrast between this and the life of man is so sharp that he desires death, and presents the image of his own death in such a scene. Then by another contrast he reflects on the bird's immunity from death—its song is among the immortal things of the world, for ever born afresh: perhaps the self-same song heard by Ruth, whose image he calls up as she stood in tears among the alien corn; the same song as that told of in old legends; whose enchanting beauty he remembers in two lines of pure romantic perfection. Lastly, the chance word "Forlorn" sweeps down the whole web; as it falls the living bird too flits away; the poet's final perceptions are of the song that fades past the near meadows, over the still stream, and of a new feeling in himself, a sense of bewilderment between waking and sleeping.

This is something much more than the expression of a simple intuition, or of a series of simple intu-

itions. It is a fabric of considerable extent and of great richness, into which are woven pictures of things seen and pictures of things imagined, present feelings and feelings remembered from the past, thoughts and judgments of several kinds. Does the inclusion of these last—these thoughts, which belong properly to the logical activity—alter or dilute the poetical character of the work? No, the elements of the poem are not set down as I have set them down, in analytical prose, but are, as it were, melted down into one single intuition, a complex intuition, grasped and expressed by one single act of the spirit. Just as in a marble pillar we may see the fossilised creatures of a former world, creatures that once were molluscs, infusoria, coral insects, with a life and functions of their own, but now are so embedded and changed in substance as to become one homogeneous mass, of another nature and fitted for another purpose, so these various intuitions and concepts, these thoughts, memories, reflections, contrasts, images real or invented, are no longer what they were, but have all passed into the deepest stratum of the poet's soul, and become both the substance and the pattern of the marble out of which his colonnades are hewn. It is in this manner that Natural Science, and every other exercise of man's reasoning power, may, in spite of belonging to a separate and very different activity, yet provide material with which to enrich the poet. He has all knowledge and all memory to draw upon, if he can but transmute them to the stuff that dreams are made of.

But now, even if we have reached an agreement as to the nature of poetry, we have still to consider the practical question, What is the use of poetry, what is the pleasure or satisfaction derived from it?—and is this the same in the case of the maker of the poetry and the reader of it? If not, is the difference a necessary and permanent one? Is it liable to increase or diminish from time to time, and does this cause the fluctations of which I spoke, the alternations of popularity and unpopularity which poetry suffers? If so, with whom does the fault lie—with the poets or with the public?

The satisfaction, the pleasure, of the poet is soon ascertained. His prime object is expression; he attains it in his poem—to a greater or less degree: he has his reward, and it is one exactly proportioned to his success. With the public the case is different. It is, of course, always open to a reader to surrender himself entirely to the direction of a chosen poet, to place himself at the same point of view, to receive his intuitions from him, and thereby to share the joy derived from their expression. This is the true way, but it is not the way which readers are always willing to take. Life is their object, and art is not their life, though it is the artist's. If, then, they come to the artist, it is for something that will help them to a fuller life, and they demand of him not merely that he shall excel in expression, but that he shall excellently express feelings such as they can understand and value. They demand that he shall chant to them, for example, their own morality, their own religion,

their own patriotism. But his morality, as artist, is to be sincere, to have no end to serve except his art itself; for him as artist, art is his religion and his native land. Incidentally, as a man, he may have intuitions to express, which are those of the public, too; he will then perhaps be popular, but only while he keeps to the popular feelings.

Is this divorce of interests so complete? Is it only incidentally that poetry can ever find favour? Is there nothing which the soul of the poet and the soul of every man have in common—no vital desire or satisfaction?

We have considered poetry from the scientific point of view: let us for a moment from the same point of view consider life. What life is we do not know, but for my present purpose it is not necessary that we should know. For the reconciliation which we desire it will be sufficient to find some element in life, some aspect of life, as it appears to our human vision, which is a vital part of poetry, and is also recognised by every man without distinction as vital to himself. I will set forth very briefly what I understand to be a view of life, hypothetical indeed, but characteristic of the speculative scientific thought of the present day. In this view we are placed in a world where there exist two great antagonistic forces—consciousness and matter. They are antagonistic in this, that matter is naturally the sphere of fatality or necessity, while consciousness is naturally the sphere of freedom. Their antagonism must be remedied by life, which is simply consciousness attempting to turn mat-

ter to its own uses, to the uses of freedom. For only in freedom can life realise itself in the highest degree, and the desire for self-realisation, the desire that we may have life and have it more abundantly, is the impulse which urges us all. We are all vessels, channels, vehicles, of one and the same spirit. This is no new philosophy, it is one which shines out from time to time, and is eclipsed again, to reappear under a different form. It is an axiom of Christianity, but in certain periods so completely obscured that after eighteen hundred years an English poet could restate it as being in his view "a grander system than the Christian religion." In one of John Keats's letters this passage occurs: "There may be intelligences or sparks of the divinity of millions, but they are not souls till they acquire identities, till each one is personally itself. . . . How then are these sparks, which are God, to have identity given them—so as to possess a bliss peculiar to each one's individual existence? How but by the medium of a world like this?" But Keats left it for a poet of our own time[1] to achieve the perfect expression of this idea.

It is not we that are strong
But the cause, the divine desire,
The longing wherewith we long.
O flame far-springing from the eternal fire,
Feed, feed upon my heart till thou consume
These bonds that do me wrong
Of time and chance and doom,
And I into thy radiance grow and glow entire!

[1] Laurence Binyon, *Odes*, p. 25.

The same idea stated as a scientific hypothesis will be found in the works of Professor Bergson.[1]

"The spectacle of the evolution of life from its very beginning down to man suggests to us the image of a current of consciousness which flows down into matter as into a tunnel." The current has found resistances, it has been obliged to split up, and dig galleries, most of which are stopped by rock that is too hard. In two directions alone has it achieved any success. Along the line of instinct it has reached the activity of the ant and the bee: along the line of intelligence it has in the human intellect escaped from the tunnel and become self-conscious. "What has been gained by forcing this tunnel, and why did life start on the undertaking?" The answer suggested is that matter plays, in relation to consciousness, the part of a hindrance which provokes effort and makes it possible. "The effort is painful, it may be very painful: and yet, whilst making it, we feel that it is as precious as, and perhaps more precious than, the work it results in, because, thanks to it, we have drawn from ourselves not only all that was there, but more than was there: we have raised ourselves above ourselves." In short, matter, the evil in the world, is at once obstacle and stimulus to our spiritual activity.

Yes, but the effort is painful: and, though it has been so far successful that the torrent of life has emerged from the tunnel of unconsciousness, it is still

[1] In *L'Evolution Creatrice,* and in the essay on "Life and Consciousness."

hindered and broken by the impediments in its course. These millions of intelligences, these sparks which are God, have had identity given them; but there is still much to mar that "bliss peculiar to each one's individual existence"; their flame has not yet consumed "these bonds that do us wrong, of time and chance and doom." Life, for all its mastery of the material world, is still imperfect, conditioned, unsatisfying. Have we no other resource?

I think we have. Bacon observed, long ago, that while Science is a subjecting of the mind to things, Art is a subjecting of things to the mind. From a time far longer ago than Bacon, man has kept his spirit alive by the choice of that alternative. Always he has observed and followed more and more carefully the laws, the invariable relations, of matter, and he has done well, though he has too often—especially on our western side of the world—sacrificed instinct to intellect. But always he has felt that he is only obeying conditions not truly understood, bowing to laws which have no sanction but force. He has triumphed in the intellectual splendour of the discoveries of Science, and reaped rather greedily their practical results: but always in his city of pain, in his house of life, in his inner chamber of memory and hope, the murmur of his unrest has been ceaseless. He has never forgotten that other way, the way not of subjection but of supremacy, the way of imaginative Art. He has never forgotten to seek consolation and delight in the re-creating of the world, in grasping this sorry scheme of things, and remoulding it nearer to the

heart's desire. Here, in my belief, is the point of reconciliation, here is the common element which poetry holds for us all, not only for the poets but for every man. This is the criterion of great poetry, that it touches the universal longing for a perfect world.

Is this too slight or too remote a bond of sympathy? Or is there on the contrary no commoner or deeper truth than this, that there are two worlds to which every man simultaneously belongs? He lives by his bodily senses and his intellect in a world of matter, governed by "laws of nature." Its language is the language of reason, its statements are such as can be verified by calculation: it is the world of prose. To any one living wholly in this world, if that were possible, beauty would be merely one particular arrangement of molecules, not more interesting than another except perhaps as the ascertained cause of a pleasurable excitement of the nerves. His representation of it would be either a diagram or a photograph: in either case a mere imitation of nature: purely prosaic.

The other world is ours too: we know it if only by the pain which this one continually gives us. So Byron wrote a century ago: "What is Poetry? The feeling of a Former world and a Future. Why, at the very height of desire and human pleasure . . . does there mingle a certain sense of doubt and sorrow, a fear of what is to come, a doubt of what *is*—a retrospect to the past, leading to a prognostication of the future?" So Komachi, the woman poet of

Japan, sang a thousand years ago: "It is because we are in Paradise that all things in this world wrong us: when we go out from Paradise nothing hurts, for nothing matters." When we enter this Paradise of Komachi's we are with the poets, whether we know it or not. The illimitable blue above the earth-cloud: the shoreless sea into which we would plunge back from our desert island: the universal life in whose freedom all is good—it is Art that gives us this: and poetry is the living voice of Art: the emotion of life made audible. It reminds us of that which is both our native land and the far country of our pilgrimage. We recognise again in every supreme moment of Art that unremembered, unforgettable kinship, "O born with me somewhere that men forget." Even while we are trudging among the roaring mechanism of our civilisation, we can always hear any word that is spoken in the language of our home.

And I shall have some peace there, for peace comes dropping slow,
Dropping from the veils of the morning to where the cricket sings;
There midnight's all a glimmer, and noon a purple glow,
And evening full of the linnet's wings.

I will arise and go now, for always night and day
I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore;
While I stand on the roadway or on the pavements grey,
I hear it in the deep heart's core.[1]

And it is to be noted that this longing, which in one way or another, is the inspiration of all the "passion-

[1] W. B. Yeats, *The Lake Isle of Innisfree.*

ate moments" of great poetry, is not merely a desire to create "a shadowy isle of bliss, Midmost the beating of that steely sea, Where tossed about all hearts of men must be"—it is not merely an escape, a refuge, an oblivion. It is a longing for a real transformation of life, a transmutation of a world of good and evil into a world of unalloyed beauty. Even the poet whose lines I have just quoted, even William Morris, though he called himself the idle singer of an empty day, was never satisfied to escape from life and forget it. In his Earthly Paradise we are never for long untouched by the home-sickness of the spirit: in his Epics, *Sigurd the Volsung* and *The Lovers of Gudrun*, as in all true Epics, we are carried into a world transfigured by heroic ardour and heroic endurance. This is still more characteristic of great tragedy. Life is never so free nor so triumphant in this world as in the moment when this world has been defied past reconciliation; the moment when the last ship has been burnt and the last fight lost; when the bright day is gone and we are for the dark; when Cleopatra calls to Iras:

> Give me my robe, put on my crown: I have
> Immortal longings in me . . .
> I am fire and air: my other elements
> I give to baser life.

Is not lyrical poetry, too, the outcry of the spirit in sorrow because of earth's limitations, or in joy because for a moment they are powerless? Both are heard in Coleridge's Ode:

O Lady! we receive but what we give,
And in our life alone does Nature live:
Ours is her wedding garment, ours her shroud!
And would we aught behold of higher worth
Than that inanimate cold world allowed
To the poor loveless, ever-anxious crowd,
Ah! from the soul itself must issue forth
A light, a glory, a fair luminous cloud
Enveloping the Earth—
And from the soul itself must there be sent
A sweet and potent voice, of its own birth,
Of all sweet sounds the life and element!

Penetrating as that is and apt for my purpose, it is not more so than Mr. Bridges's beautiful Elegy, called "Recollections of Solitude,"[1] which ends with this hymn to Poetry:

O heavenly Muse, for heavenly thee we call,
Who in the fire of love refinest all,
Accurst is he who hark'neth not thy voice:
But happy he who, numbered of thy choice,
Walketh aloof from nature's clouded plan:
For all God's world is but the thought of man:
Wherein hast thou re-formed a world apart,
The mutual mirror of his better heart;
There is no foulness, misery, nor sin,
But he who loves finds his desire therein,
And there with thee in lonely commune lives:
Nay, all that nature gave or fortune gives,
Joys that his spirit is most jealous of—
His only-embraced and best-deserving love,—

[1] Published in the *Monthly Review* for February, 1903, and not yet reprinted.

Wear their eternity and are loved best
By thee transfigured and in thee possest:
Who madest beauty, and from thy boundless store
Of beauty shalt create for evermore.

This passage not only shows us once more how by poetry man may walk "aloof from nature's clouded plan" and "re-form a world apart," but it contains a reflection which is the answer to a possible doubt. The theory that Art is an imitation of nature has long ago been explained away; but undeniably there is great poetry which might be described as realistic: which comes near to daily life, both in its subjects and in the use of very simple or common speech. The sonnets of Shakespeare, those other sonnets which time has set beside them—George Meredith's Modern Love—the Songs and Sonnets of Donne, the Dramatic Lyrics of Browning, the Wessex Poems of Thomas Hardy—these are the most familiar examples. These abound in passionate moments, but is it with the voice of the imagination or of what is called "the real world" that they stir us?

They stir us—the answer is there: they stir us to exultation, to laughter, to tears. But the "real" world, the world of reason, of common sense, of prose, has of its own nature, no passion, no humour, no true drama. It is built on other foundations altogether, on calculation, on legality, on efficiency: it is a world where Peace Conferences propose to eliminate the honour of nations,, and juries to assess the value of love in cash: where one popular author will write books to tell you that feeling is only useful as a means

to thinking, and another will write plays to persuade you that poverty is a crime and love an untruth to nature, and romance the source of both these evils. In such a world—in a world of pure argument—what passion, what humour, what drama could there be? These do exist in "real" life, but only in that part of it where the two circles of the practical and the poetical intersect: where the two worlds meet and are one. In that region, as the Muse taught Mr. Bridges so clearly, all our natural joys exist, but natural as they are, and "real" as we call them, they are so only because they are by poetry transfigured and in poetry possest: otherwise they would be merely subjects for the laboratory. There, I suppose, one or other of the sciences would reduce part of them to useful appetites, and reject the remainder: Art alone preserves the passions by transmuting them.

These lyric poems then are among the greatest, and also among the nearest to everyday life. They are so great and so near, that they seem to give in brief eternal moments that very insight and purification which tragedy gave to an earlier world. The growing recognition of this, the growing preference for lyrical poetry, is from time to time deplored by some of our contemporary critics. I do not myself think a reader unreasonable if he prefers a fine lyric, perfect in itself, to a fine passage from an epic or a play of much larger bulk but of unequally sustained beauty. The intuition or the dramatic power expressed in the one may be as great as that elaborated in the other: as Whistler once said, when his etching

was rejected as too small, a work of art is not estimated by its acreage. In any case the poets should escape condemnation, for many of the best now living among us—Mr. Binyon, Mr. Bridges, Mr. Doughty, Mr. Hardy, Mr. Hewlett, Mr. Sturge Moore, Mrs. Woods and Mr. Yeats, have written poems of orthodox form and size, and of much more than orthodox beauty. It is true that in their shorter poems they have almost all moved us with an even greater because more concentrated power. My reading of that fact is that it is a sign of the return of man upon his too hurried trail, the advance in which he gained so much, but threw away so much upon the march: a return to the way of intuition, to rapture, to direct swift vision: to a more instinctive joy at the sound of every voice from the Land of Heart's Desire. It will be remembered how Matthew Arnold lamented that "Gray, a born poet, fell upon an age of prose, an age whose task was such as to call forth in general men's powers of understanding, wit, and cleverness, rather than their deepest powers of mind and soul." The poetry of that century was therefore "intellectual, argumentative, ingenious: not seeing things in their truth and beauty, not interpretative." In moments of depression this may recur to our minds as an analogy, but I do not think that depression is justified. In the life of this generation, as in that of others, there is much that is materialistic, argumentative, prosaic: but for spiritual depth and intensity, as for rhythmical beauty, its poetry is unsurpassed. It is true that though the poetry is great,

there are no "great poets," but who would think that nobility was at an end because the creation of titles of honour was suspended? Realities are not abolished by a change in our way of speaking of them.

The question is however important, for it is not only our way of speaking but our way of thinking that is at the root of it. The following passage from a book recently published under the title *Interiora Rerum,* illustrates as completely as could be wished the point of view against which I am contending. "The deepest utterances of the human spirit are in prose, for the fullest emotions speak for themselves and require no adornment. Thus we feel no surprise at the non-appearance at the present time of a great poet."

Every one is entitled to his opinion on a point of taste, and if we are simply told that in A.B.'s view there are no great poets now, we can do no more than agree or disagree. But if A.B. gives his reasons we may be able to judge of his opinion by the standard of reason or of fact. Will the facts here relied on bear examination? Is it not on the contrary true that the deepest utterances of the human spirit are in poetry? And the reason? Might we not more reasonably say "for the fullest emotions speak for themselves, and whenever they do so, whether in rhythmic or unrhythmic language, the result is poetry?" Lastly, is it in accordance with our experience to maintain that great poets are only great in adornment and are naturally incapable of expressing the

fullest emotions of the human spirit? Is it not on the contrary within the knowledge of every one that this nation, in the hour of its darkest trial and its profoundest feeling, has turned to poetry for strength and consolation and above all for the utterance of its passion? And to whose poetry? To the poetry not only of the dead but of the living.

II

POETRY AND RHYTHM

We commonly use the word "poetry" in two distinct senses, and when we hear it used in either we have, as a rule, no difficulty in understanding which sense is intended. If we are told, for example, that "there is very little poetry in Crabbe," and also that "for twelve years Crabbe's outflow of poetry was constant and voluminous," we realise that the first of these statements refers to poetry as the element which distinguishes the poetic from the prosaic; the second to the mass of work in which that element, whatever its richness or poverty, is actually embodied. But by making the same word do duty at one time for the substance or nature of poetry, and at another for the form in which it is externalised, we have fostered a delusion—the very common belief that prose is prose and verse is poetry, that the essential difference is the difference of form, and not of substance. It is true that there is a very intimate connection between poetry in the true sense of the word and rhythm or metrical expression, but it is a connection which is not invariable or essential. In order to keep this clear, in my last chapter I adhered throughout to one meaning for the word poetry. When I asked

"What is poetry?" I was asking one question only, "What is the distinction between the poetic and the prosaic?" and we found it to be this—that the one is the expression of the æsthetic or intuitive activity, the other the expression of the intellectual or logical activity of the human spirit. An intuition or set of intuitions, once grasped and expressed in words, will be a poem—good or bad—even though the words take the form of what is commonly called prose; a set of logical or intellectual judgments will be none the less prose though they are stated in some form of verse. A work of art in words is always poetry; a work of science, in whatever form of words, would always be prose.

This is strictly true, but it is a truth not always recognised. I shall not be surprised if I hear the retort, "Then a novel is poetry." Certainly a novel is essentially poetry: it is written without metre, and it contains a large amount of prosaic detail and dialogue—it may even include general reflections by the author—but it is at bottom the expression of an intuition, a vast and complex intuition amounting to the vision of a new world of human life created by the novelist's imagination. If it is a good novel, the statements of fact and prosaic judgments embodied in it will have been melted down into one mass with the purely æsthetic element. This is generally realised, though without full consciousness of its meaning. Most readers would admit that Mr. Hardy's novels, for example, are more poetical, contain less of the unfused prosaic elements than (say) those of

Zola, whose realistic detail is disproportionate and too often inserted cold. Fielding's *Tom Jones* has often been called an epic; Mr. Henry James's last novel, *The Outcry,* is no less obviously a drama. But to all work of this kind we customarily allot the name of fiction, and deny that of poetry, which we reserve for such verbal expression as is most strictly rhythmical.

We may pass on then to consider poetry in its second meaning, to inquire why poetry and rhythm are so intimately connected, that when we speak of one we generally imply the other, and afterwards we may analyse the different systems upon which poetical rhythms have been and are now being created. In this, as in our former analysis, we shall have two main purposes. The first will be, as before, to do something towards destroying the common or pedagogic view of poetic art, the view that metre is a kind of decoration applied as it were externally and to be judged by an external standard, a standard of beauty or fitness or even of mere correctness. The vast majority of what are generally called well-educated persons in this country have, in the very process of their education, been impressed with the belief that metre is an arrangement of language which can be judged by the application of a mechanical test, and that the poet who produces a line which does not answer to the test is a fit subject for correction by any critic who can point out the discrepancy. It is true that we are more enlightened than we were: there is a public which has learnt to smile at the re-

viewer who declares that a line "will not scan," or that it contains a "trochee" where it should have had an "iamb," without considering whether it was ever intended to "scan," or whether there is anything in English verse which can be treated as the absolute equivalent of a Greek or Latin trochee. But if such a criticism should appear it would still find a ready acceptance with many—with nearly all those, for instance, who contributed to a recent correspondence in the *Spectator* on the subject of the "English Hexameter." And the fallacy does appear, in much subtler forms. In the *Poetry Review* for February, 1912, a critic, who is himself a poet, and whom I always read with great interest, speaks of his struggle "to find out what has been done, once for all, better than it can ever be done again, and to find out what remains for us to do." Another even more distinguished writer has lately made emphatic use of the word "pattern" in elaborating his description of poetry. I do not attribute any heretical intention to either of these writers, but it is within my own knowledge that they have been quoted to support the theory of an external standard, of types of beauty to which poems should conform. But if every work of art is simply the expression of the artist's intuition, it is evident that an absolute or complete pattern would be useless, since the intuitions of two different minds could never be expressed by the same form: nor can anything in art be said to have been "done once for all," since if it were "done again" by another hand—used, that is, to express the intuition of another spirit

—it would be no longer what had been done before. It is a matter of common experience among poets that where a metre already well known is again used by a new writer, it often passes unrecognised: being, indeed, so changed with the change of subject and personal rhythm as to be no longer, in any vital sense, the same metre at all.

Our second motive for inquiry will be the desire to understand the position of living poets with regard to rhythm. This is no question of small technicalities which do not concern the reader: it is a matter on the right understanding of which depends the attitude of each generation towards the most masterful and original of the poets whom it produces. With the majority of those who read English poetry the charm of familiarity seems to be the most powerful. A new song—to an old tune: a new story, but told in a voice that we know: that is the general demand. From time to time a writer appears who gives forth, probably rather from lack of assimilative power than by deliberate choice, a mere echo of one of these voices of the past: he is almost sure of a certain popularity, and the paradoxical catchword of his admirers is that, "he has the authentic note" of Keats, of Milton, of Shakespeare—or perhaps of all three. This is regrettable: an art that lived by imitation of the past would be an art in full decadence. But it is easy to be too quick with an accusation of this kind: for it is natural that in a great literature, flourishing through many generations, there should be influences and lines of legitimate descent: a man born in one

century may, like Chatterton, have the habit of thought and feeling characteristic of another, or express himself, like Francis Thompson, in a voice which is not less his own because it is unmistakably like the voice of his spiritual ancestors. On the other hand, the founders of the future, those who are in their generation "full-welling fountain heads of change," will often be innovators in expression as well as in thought, and the sooner we understand their rhythm the sooner we shall enter into possession of gifts that can be conveyed to us in no other way.

What then is Rhythm? What is the nature, the origin, the historical development of poetic Rhythm?

Of rhythm in general the most significant thing that we can say is this, that it seems to be always present where there is life. The waves of light and sound which give the world to our sight and hearing, the pulses of our own blood and breathing, are familiar examples: but science has traced many deeper processes to the same starting-point, and Professor Bateson's inquiries into the tendency of life to reduplication are perhaps the very latest aid to our understanding of natural law. It is not surprising then, if rhythm is of the essence of vitality, that it should appear in human speech, and especially in poetic speech, the expression of those emotions in which man lives most intensely. And we find that, in fact, every nation has its own speech-rhythm, apt for the expression of its daily life, and gaining or losing in beauty from the dignity or the degradation of that life. We find also that there are more regular

rhythms than these, more regular recurrences or reduplications, which belong only to the poetry of the several languages. I have spoken before of the two worlds in which we all live—the worlds of science and poetry, the world which nature has given us, and the world which we have by the imagination of the thoughts of the heart made for ourselves. When we pass from the one to the other our words tend by a natural instinct to step in rhythm as a gesture more expressive of the loftier and intenser life which is lived there. Perhaps the most primitive instance of this known to us is the very familiar one of Hebrew poetry. The rhythm of this is a parallelism or a simple reduplication of each phrase in a slightly different form:

> Behold, a king shall reign in righteousness,
> And princes shall rule in judgment,
> And a man shall be as a hiding place from the wind,
> And a covert from the tempest:
> As rivers of water in a dry place,
> As the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.

It is noticeable that in the prophetic books such passages as this occur frequently, but as a rule in the dramatic parts only, and not in the narrative. The same change, from speech-rhythm to poetic rhythm, is constantly to be seen in the prose work of English writers: it is probably always unintentional, and is commonly considered a fault of style. But this condemnation is too indiscriminate: it may be that such a transition is sometimes abrupt and

meaningless, but there is no reason why it should not be simply expressive. The instinct is the same instinct that was working in the Hebrew; the elevation of mood beyond a certain point tends to force the utterance into a more marked rhythm, and if the effect is beautiful in a translation of Amos or Isaiah, it may be beautiful also in the mouth of an English seer or prophet. Such was John Ruskin, and his eloquence often rose into poetic rhythm; as in the peroration where he exhorts his hearers to "Reverence, for all that is gracious among the living, great among the dead, and marvellous in the Powers that cannot die." I have marked with pleasure the same instinctive grace in the poetical stories which Mr. Francis Bain sends back to us from the East, and in Mr. Delamare's highly imaginative romance of *Henry Brocken*. By their sense of beauty these writers are moved to rhythm at certain moments as naturally as a child is moved to dance for joy.

In fact Poetry is in its origin more akin to dancing than to song. It may resemble song in certain respects, but it cannot be derived from it. Rhythm is before song: song depends but little upon words, and the effects of the finest music are not the effects of poetry. The rhythms of poetry can be conveyed to a listener without words, melody or tune of any kind: as in the game of our youth, when we used to drum upon a table, without speaking, the measure of any well-known line or stanza, and challenge each other to guess the words. The oldest ballads were literally "ballata," that is, dances: the narrative was

sung by the minstrel and the refrains were sung with action by the dancers.

It seems reasonable, then, to believe that the descent of poetry is this: the rhythmic instinct of life begot the movement of dancing: dancing was accompanied and regulated by the beating of the measure in monotone: and this drum-rhythm was then impressed upon language, which became thereby more beautiful, more emotional, and more memorable.

We have now come to a point of the most crucial importance. It was impossible that a perfectly regular rhythm should be fully impressed upon language, because language already had a rhythm of its own, necessary to its meaning, and never wholly to be obliterated. In poetry as we know it—I am speaking of poetry in the European languages—there is no such thing as perfect or rigid rhythm. That is a fiction of those who have read the Classics without understanding. What there has always been—whether in Greek or Latin, or in modern poetry—is an antagonism, a balance, a compromise, between the metrical ictus, the drum-beat which I have imagined, and the common speech-rhythm of the language. Poetic rhythm is, in short, neither strict mechanical rhythm nor free speech-rhythm: it is speech limited by metric law, or Prosody. To illustrate this it is only necessary to open any poet at any page. When Shakespeare wrote "Angels are bright still, though the brightest fell," he was limiting himself to ten syllables for the line, but he was not mechanically arranging those syllables so that they

should be alternately unstressed and stressed. He did not intend his line to be read thus:

Angéls are bríght still, thoúgh the bríghtest féll,

any more than Keats when he wrote "Thea, Thea, Thea, where is Saturn?" intended it to be pronounced:

Theá, Theá, Theá, where ís Satúrn?

In fact, neither in the work of these poets, nor in that of any others, is verse of the strictly regular form, "ritum ritum ritum ritum ritum," found to occur with any frequency. It suits Tennyson's mood best, and produces the desired effect of luxurious monotony; at times, nearly one in three of his lines will be of this type. But in more masculine verse it is comparatively rare, and most of the beauty of the lines and all their variety is gained by the skill with which the woof of speech-rhythm is continually thrown athwart the warp of the metrical type. A master hand like Swinburne's will throw the shuttle a hundred times and produce no less than fifty different effects. All but one of these are departures from the strict type, but they are not wholly arbitrary, they are governed by the poet's prosody, the rules which he adopts for his art. It may be asked why, if so much liberty is allowed, there should be any restraints at all?—why make laws for your lawlessness? What you are seeking is beautiful rhythm; why not simply choose out the most beautiful natural

speech-rhythm, and take no thought for a metrical type which you do not mean to submit to? In answer to this it can only be said that the result of such an attempt has always been failure; it would seem absolutely necessary to have some recognised scheme as a basis, and such a scheme, owing to the nature of language, must be in some respects artificial. Without the help of this artificial restraint dignity is not attained, and the hearer loses the most characteristic pleasure of rhythm, the pleasure of having a certain expectation satisfied, though it is never satiated. Blank verse, just because it is the freest of all our metres, is the most liable to these dangers. Since any one syllable in a blank verse line may be either long or short, accented or unaccented, the commonest forms of language may be used in it without difficulty, and whereas in stricter forms of verse their effect might be one of dignified and moving simplicity, in this metre they will become mere doggerel or bad prose. The following lines are taken at random from Cowper's "Task," and are by no means unrepresentative of what he could from time to time descend to:

> Scenes must be beautiful which daily viewed
> Please daily, and whose novelty survives
> Long knowledge and the scrutiny of years:
> Praise justly due to those that I describe.

I will quote a still more striking instance, in which the descent is no doubt intentional. Mr. Abercrombie[1] has put these verses into the mouth of

[1] *Emblems of Love*, p. 24.

Ahasuerus, a king who speaks often with barbaric force and dignity, but in the last line of this speech exposes a degraded thought in fitly degraded rhythm:

> Happy art thou, Vashti, to have wedded
> One who so dearly rates possession of thee.
> Better it is to spend my heart on thee
> Than on any of the women that I have.

For any but a purely dramatic purpose, such a line would be intolerable.

A prosody, then, or metric law, there must be, to save the gesture from becoming invertebrate. Of what nature is the law to be? On what principle is it to be founded? Language—in Europe—admits of several systems; three have been used in the poetry with which we are familiar, and as these have been developed one out of another, I shall describe them in their historical order.

[1] The first system was founded on quantity, and was the invention of the Greeks. It was highly characteristic of their genius, for it was scientific—the result of deliberation—since it involved a new control of the method of speech. In their language, as in ours, the syllables in ordinary speech were of many gradations of quantity, and were individually capable of variation. It was necessary to reduce the number of gradations, and to make the values constant. This was done by an arbitrary convention: the syllables

[1] I have to thank Mr. Robert Bridges for invaluable suggestions for this section.

of all the words in their language were divided into two classes only, long and short, one long syllable being in quantity the equivalent of two short ones. The Latins borrowed this system, and enforced it with even greater rigidity, for certain freedoms which the Greeks allowed themselves occasionally, are scarcely to be paralleled at all in the best Latin verse. But both Greeks and Latins, though they wrote by quantity, continued to speak mainly, as we do, by stress: and neither tried to arrange the words in the line so that the speech-stress should coincide precisely with the metrical ictus or quantitative pattern.

I will give you a simple illustration of this. The word "Trojanas" is by quantity made up of three equally long syllables (Trō-jān-ās): but in speech it consists of one stressed syllable between two unstressed, and is pronounced "Trojánas." In fact, in this word, and in a multitude of others, stress and quantity do not correspond. The happy result of this is that a poem like Virgil's *Æneid,* containing twenty-four thousand lines, all made on one pattern, with slight variations, is no longer uniform or monotonous when it comes to be read, because any two lines, even when made up of exactly the same longs and shorts, will often have their stresses in quite different parts of the line. The dead, mechanical pattern will be uniform in both, but the two living lines will each have their own clearly marked individuality. I open a chance page of my Virgil, and I find not two but three lines close together, in which the quantities are absolutely identical, thus:

Trojanas ut opes et lamentabile regnum....
Sed si tantus amor casus cognoscere nostros....
Instar montis equum divina Palladis arte....

The quantitive pattern is identical, but when we come to read them properly we find at once that the first line has four (or perhaps five) stresses:

Trojánas ut ópes et lamentábile régnum

the second has five,

Sed si tántus ámor cásus cognóscere nóstros

and the third has six,

Ínstar móntis équum divína Pálladis árte.

Moreover, these stresses, except the two towards the end, fall for the most part in quite different places in the line. The lines are therefore entirely the same in quantity and almost entirely different in stress-rhythm, and it is this varying contradiction of the two elements which makes the pleasing effect of the verse and gives it its flexibility for expression. This warp-and-woof effect is analogous to that which we have already observed in English blank verse: the only difference is that while the common speech-rhythm of the language used is in both cases the woof, in the Latin the warp is the quantitive pattern, actually though faintly present, but in the English it is a pattern of five regular beats seldom actually present in the verse but always existing in the memory

of the reader or hearer. It is strange that Englishmen, well accustomed in their own verse to this perpetual compromise between the type and the reality, should be so generally unable to realise the existence of a similar effect in the Latin. The sham hexameters of Longfellow, Clough,[1] and Kingsley, combined with schoolboy recollections of "scanning," seem to have convinced the educated reader that stressed and unstressed syllables are the same as long and short syllables, that there are always six stresses in a hexameter, placed at regular intervals, and that all such lines as those which I have quoted should be read as having one and the same rhythm, a rhythm exactly the same as the line

Here we drearily tramp, we tramp, tramp, tramp in a treadmill.

while the rest of Virgil's music is confined to such variations as

Drearily here we tramp,

or, more expressive still,

Drearily, drearily, here we drearily tramp in a treadmill.

Even the barbarians knew better. On the break-up of the Roman Empire the law of quantity perished: stress only remained, but it was the right stress, the

[1] Clough was aware that the verse of his *Bothie* had little in common with the Latin metre, and in his *Amours de Voyage* he made very interesting experiments in true quantitive elegiacs.

stress of common speech. Commodian, for instance, an African poet of the fourth century, knew nothing about the artificial rules of long and short: but he knew how Virgil's lines were read by the Romans, and he imitated the arrangement of their stresses though not that of their quantities: he wrote

In tálibus spés est véstra de Chrísto refécto.

and was satisfied that it was a good hexameter, because though it contains three false quantities (all unknown to him), its stresses are the same in number and position as those of Virgil's line:

Dardánidæ infénsi poénas cum sánguine póscunt.

By this curious method of imitation he kept all the variety of the old rhythm, though he lost its beauty: and, incidentally, he did us the great service of emphasising the fact that the Latins did not read their poetry on the tramp-in-a-treadmill principle.

Quantity then perished as a base for prosody and in spite of Commodian's *tour de force* the system of Latin verse seems to have fallen almost completely into ruin. Some remnants of a tradition were preserved, in Mr. Bridges's belief, by the writers of the early Latin hymns. The new prosody of European verse which was evolved from these was a syllabic system, and may be tabulated as follows:

(1) A line consists of a fixed number of syllables.
(2) Extra syllables are only allowed when elision can be supposed to take place.

(3) Any syllable in the line may be long or short.
(4) Any syllable may be stressed or unstressed, though in practice there are limits to this licence, and in particular
(5) a line must contain so many stressed syllables, and so placed, as to content an ear haunted by the idea of regular alternate stresses.

The heirs of the dead Roman Empire all adopted this system sooner or later, but with characteristic differences. The Italians by a very free use of the fiction called elision relieved themselves of the rigid numerical restriction of syllables. Dante's verses, nominally of five feet each, have in reality any number of syllables from eleven to sixteen: in the line "Poscia ch' io ebbi il mio dottore udito" there are sixteen, besides one which is lost in the true elision, "ch' io." The French, having a much less marked speech-stress, kept the syllabic principle more strictly. Both added rhyme to their versification, and rhyme proved to be valuable in several ways. First—and this was probably its original purpose—it pleased the hearer by adding a fresh set of expectations and satisfactions. Secondly, it helped to develop metrical form, for it led on from couplets to alternating rhymes, and so to the various stanzas. Thirdly, it was valuable to the composer of poetry in steadying him, in restricting the too great freedom allowed him by a system so loose and feeble as the syllabic prosody.

> For rhymes the rudders are of verses,
> With which like ships they steer their courses.

It is not difficult, then, to see the advantages and disadvantages by which the future of rhyme will be decided. For dramatic, narrative, or reflective poetry it will always be unnecessary: both because such work is by its content independent of more trivial pleasures, and because it needs to approach more nearly to ordinary speech-rhythm than is possible if rhyme is to alter the position of the words. But in lyric poetry, which aims first at emotional beauty, and is suggestive rather than explanatory, it will probably always be retained.

Rhyme was introduced into England by Norman minstrels after the Conquest, and syllabic rhymed verse, first French and afterwards English, made a certain progress in this country until the fourteenth century, when a much greater output of poetry suddenly appears and reveals a new situation. The Anglo-Saxons had for centuries had a prosody of their own, which was not syllabic but based on stress, with alliteration added. Most lovers of poetry have some acquaintance with the "Vision of Langland concerning Piers Plowman," or with the similar poem called "Richard the Redeless" on the deposition of King Richard II. The latter has these lines on the extravagance in dress of the young man of the period:

Now by the law of Lydford, in land ne in water,
Thilk lewd lad ought evil to thrive
That hangeth on his hippis more than he winneth,
And doubteth no debt, so Dukis him praise,
But beggeth and borroweth of burgess in towns
Furris of foyne and other fell ware,
And not the better of a bean, though they borrow ever.

The carrying power of the stresses is here so great that a few syllables more or less do not break down the metre, nor is rhyme needed to strengthen it. It has the faults of hardness and monotony, but it shows clearly that the old English verse possessed a vitality which would not easily be conquered by the invasion of the syllabic system. The struggle between the two lasted for centuries: the course of it was briefly this. The orthodox system was the syllabic; but nonconformity was steadily encouraged by the English sense of stress. Blank verse was bound to have exactly ten syllables to the line, but our greatest poets gave it eight, nine, eleven, or twelve when they felt moved to do so. Lyric metres were even more loosely written, with abrupt bare stresses or skipping short syllables, the understanding being that so long as the rhythm is preserved, that is, so long as the stresses are sufficiently represented, a good deal of illegality in the syllables will be condoned. Milton, himself the boldest of all makers of rhythm, was apparently conscience-stricken at this illegality, and invented a set of plausible fictions by which he could prove himself to be still within the orthodox syllabic fold. But the modernist tendency went on as before. Sooner or later it was sure to occur to some one to ask whether this organised hypocrisy was worth keeping up: whether stress pure and simple might not be a sufficient base for a recognised prosody. To how many it actually did occur we do not know: but Coleridge was the first to make the proposal in print. In the preface to "Christabel" he says, "I have only to add that

the metre is not, properly speaking, irregular, though it may seem so from its being founded on a new principle, namely, that of counting in each line the accents, not the syllables. Though the latter (the syllables) may vary from seven to twelve, yet in each line the accents will be found to be only four."

This preface is apparently very seldom read: or perhaps it is, as Mr. Bridges has said, too simple to be understood. Certainly nothing could possibly be simpler: you set out to write a poem, say in short couplets; you express your story as you conceive it, in words placed in their natural order, with their natural pronunciation and stresses: when you have got four beats or stresses, with such unstressed syllables as they happen to carry with them, your rhythm is complete, you rhyme and pass to the next line:

'Tis the míddle of níght by the cástle clóck,
And the ówls have awákened the crówing cóck—

See what variety is obtainable even in so plain a metre.

Ís the níght chílly and dárk?
The níght is chílly but nót dárk.

These last two lines have only seven and eight syllables: but they each have their four stresses, as clearly as the first two with their eleven syllables, and they therefore give the same satisfaction, while they avoid monotony.

For the failure of his readers to understand anything so easy as this, Coleridge is himself partly to blame. Clearly as he had stated his new principle in the Preface, before he had gone far with *Christabel* he had forgotten it altogether and was writing such lines as these:

> *From* her kénnel benéath the róck
> Máketh ánswer *to* the clóck.

which, if read naturally, have only three stresses each: to make them into four-stressed lines you must give a conventional stress to the words "from" and "to"; and there is your whole system destroyed at once, for it is the stresses which ought to make the line, not the line to cause the stresses. So Coleridge's attempt failed through his own inconsistency: but the idea survived, and any one who will may see the working of it in such poems as Shelley's "Away! the moor is dark beneath the moon," Moore's "At the mid hour of night when stars are weeping, I fly," and Matthew Arnold's "Strayed Reveller" and "Rugby Chapel." But the first poet to use this principle with full command, to show that a prosody based on it may give range as well as power to the poetic instrument, is Mr. Robert Bridges. Read first, for the expression of a picturesque fancy, the poem called "A Passer-by":

> Whither, O splendid ship, thy white wings crowding,
> Leaning across the bosom of the urgent West,
> That fearest nor sea rising, nor sky clouding,
> Whither away, fair rover, and what thy quest?

Ah! soon, when Winter has all our vales opprest,
When skies are cold and misty, and hail is hurling,
Wilt thóu glide on the blue Pacific, or rest
In a summer haven asleep, thy white sails furling.

For ra[illegible]d pathos, that "On a Dead Child":

Perfect little body, without fault or stain on thee,
With promise of strength and manhood full and fair!
Though cold and stark and bare,
The bloom and the charm of life doth awhile remain on thee.

To me, as I move thee now in the last duty,
Dost thou with a turn or gesture anon respond;
Startling my fancy fond
With a chance attitude of the head, a freak of beauty.

For realistic description that called "London Snow":

When men were all asleep the snow came flying
In large white flakes falling on the city brown;
Stealthily and perpetually settling and loosely lying,
Hushing the latest traffic of the drowsy town.
Deadening, muffling, stifling its murmurs failing;
Lazily and incessantly floating down and down:
Silently sifting and veiling road, roof and railing;
Hiding difference, making unevenness even,
Into angles and crevices softly drifting and sailing.

Lastly, for dramatic humour read the verse into which this poet has transposed Terence, in his play called "The Feast of Bacchus": the speech of one Roman old gentleman to another:

"What in Heaven's name
Can be your object? What do you drive at? To guess your age

You are sixty years at least. There's no one hereabouts
Can show a better farm, nor more servants upon it:
And yet you do the work yourself, as though you had none.
Never do I go out, however early in the morning,
Never come home again, however late at night,
But here I see you digging, hoeing, or at all events
Toiling at something or other. You are never a moment idle."

It will be seen at once that in these poems there is not only new beauty of content, but the sound of a new instrument for expressing it. There are lines here which are not merely fresh in their rhythm, but which could not, so long as the words keep their natural accentuation, exist at all in any other kind of English metre known to us.

Is this a merely technical excellence? Have I after all been attempting to give a lesson in craftsmanship? No; both rhyme and metre are in one aspect technical powers, and many things are revealed to those who think long about them, or attempt to use them, but I have kept as clear as possible of these mysteries. The art of poetry must be left to the poets: but I have tried to deal in outline with the science of it, in order to obtain a better hearing for their music. If the audience are misinformed as to the very scale in which it is written, there must be disappointment on both sides. There has long been much misunderstanding about metre, caused partly by conservative prejudice, partly by a fear that the recognition of new methods must involve a depreciation of long inherited

treasures, a tarnishing of long honoured names. This is the reverse of the truth: to believe that resemblance to great predecessors, or conformity to past standards, is the test of excellence—that would be the really sweeping condemnation of all that is greatest in the work of our older poets, for their glory is that they spoke for their own souls and every one with his own voice. If we desire that English poetry should be once more reconsidered and revalued, it is in order that this may appear more clearly and that we may learn to judge of living poets by the same principle, instead of demanding from them an unchanging orthodoxy which their poetical ancestors all consciously or unconsciously repudiated.

What, then, we are asking when we attempt to lay bare for a moment the nature and history of poetic rhythm, is this. We are asking for the recognition of two principles, and the constant application of them in judging poetry old or new. First, that poetic rhythm is not an applied ornament, nor the result of a mechanical process, nor the fit subject of a pedantic criticism. It is, on the contrary, part of the poet's means of expression, and an aid to the communication between spirit and spirit: its quality is of a subjective nature, and should be studied mainly from a subjective point of view. We may, if we please, try to separate and examine its components, but we must not expect to find our analysis exhaustive, or attempt to found authoritarian doctrine upon it.

The second principle will be that since poetry is a personal expression, and the essence of personality is

distinctive, the natural tendency of poetic rhythm will be towards perpetual change. It is strange that any opinion, any feeling, however conservative, should fight against this, for it means that while we keep all that the past has given, what we shall receive from the future will be new gifts instead of copies of old ones. And, whether welcome or unwelcome, the historical fact is beyond dispute that our poetry has shown a long continued development of rhythm, and always the effort has been towards greater freedom, to be used for more complete and natural self-expression. In the present age as in the past, this effort is being made, but it is being made now with unexampled vigour and intelligence. We are witnessing the actual recovery from a period of deadness. Mr. Gosse once said that Tennyson's power may be estimated by the fact that "he was able to hold English poetry stationary for sixty years." If that is true, and there certainly is truth in it, it suggests that we are wise in no longer setting our best poets up on pedestals. Hypnotism is not inspiration. What poet has to learn from poet is not a trick of the hand, or a set of cadences, or a formula, or an orthodox tradition, it is a passion for sincerity. To one observer at least our poets seem to have recovered that passion. They have determined to be no longer unnecessarily hindered by old conventions of diction, of "scanning," of unnatural stress and ungrammatical inversion: they are bent on getting nearer to the inward melody, on moving more faithfully to the inward rhythm. In this determination I see no law-

lessness, no "aischrolatreia," no cult of the ugly or the eccentric. I see and desire others to see in it the old and true instinct of the English poets, the belief that formal beauty is begotten, not of the hand of the artist, but of the spirit.

III

POETRY AND PERSONALITY

THE question which I am now proposing to discuss is one of those generally described as controversial. Certainly it has often in the past been the subject of controversy: there have been ardent and even violent partisans of the Classical and the Romantic, the Objective and the Subjective, the Impersonal and the Personal in Art. But I believe that while this long war has been going on the *casus belli* has in reality disappeared: the world has so changed that neither a purely Greek nor a purely Mediæval method could make any claim to give it the poetry which it needs. I shall therefore treat the controversy simply as a matter of history, and put it forth only as an introduction—one of those studies which are necessary to the full understanding of the present position of poetry and its immediate outlook.

The impersonal theory, the objective view of art, has the prestige of a Greek ancestry, and it had at first undisputed possession of the field. It was, of course, only a theory. In practice the Greek artist, like every other human artist, expressed in his work the intuitions of his own spirit: but this was not the

account given of him by his contemporary critics; his sole aim, according to them, was to produce a certain effect upon his audience. What, then, was the criterion by which his work was to be estimated? Was success in art to be gauged by popularity? The mere suggestion was painful to the Greeks, and they made, as their followers have ever since made, violent mental contortions in order to escape it. Sometimes they summoned to their aid a phantom called The Universal: sometimes they referred everything to the decision of The Cultivated Man. That is to say, they replaced the common jury they despised by an imaginary judge, whose qualifications were to be exactly those which every critic would naturally like to think his own. The man who has been educated —in the proper way: educated in your own sense of the word—is not he the umpire you would prefer, if you cannot decide the case for yourself? And does not the system work well in practice? In questions of literature especially, is not the verdict of the cultivated the one which ultimately prevails? Let us admit at once that it does prevail, and is likely to prevail, in the majority of cases; but let us not forget that in those rarer and far more critical moments when a new light dawns in the sky, when a new world is discovered or created, the judgment which relies on tradition can only be right by accident, by coincidence, and is, in fact, too often obstinately and fiercely wrong. Whenever poetry appears which is both new and strong, the power which can appreciate it is not the power of learning or of educated taste;

it is the power of insight, of sympathy with the human spirit seeking expression.

This was not seen by the Greeks; perfect as their art was within its own limitations, their theory remained blindly objective. The late Professor Butcher, in his admirable edition of Aristotle's *Poetics,* has pleaded for them that they were only blind of one eye. A work of art, he argued, may either be an expression of the artist, or it may be "a realisation of its own idea," and so objectively perfect. The Greeks saw *that,* at any rate, and were therefore, he argued, right on one point out of two. But, we may ask, what is the "idea" of a work of art, apart from the idea of its author? Alice-through-the-Looking-Glass was indignant at being told that she was "only a thing in the Red King's dream"; and she was right, for *she* was the living personality, and he, as it turned out, only a thing in *her* dream. Is a poem or a picture a living personality that it should have an idea of its own, and "realise" that idea? Such playing with words is not only futile, but dangerous. This particular fallacy has long been the ruin of criticism. "He has not caught the idea of the thing"—that is how we constantly hear it in the vernacular, or, more crudely still, "that is not *my* idea of it." The artist, then, is successful if he expresses the critic's idea, or the traditional idea, of the subject; unsuccessful if he expresses his own, and his own happens to be original! Happily this menial theory has had little hold on the poets. Not that they have altogether escaped it; in

every age there have been examples of the great objective fallacy, huge examples of mere builder's mania, often piled up in response to a call from the critics, or from Philistine patrons, a call for "the more ambitious forms of creative work." If only it were "creative"! If only these vast follies had had built into them some of the personality, the subjective distinction, which continually save an *Æneid* or a *Paradise Lost* from the Limbo of those Epics which, as Gaston Paris said, "have the misfortune not to exist."

But in the main the poets have gone the poet's way: ancient or modern, they have all lived with one life, the life of the spirit. The Greek and Latin poets themselves will bear this out. I appeal to one who knows them well. Professor Mackail, in his Oxford Lectures, after telling us that "the pure Greek mind was the least romantic of all in history," and that in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* "the personal note is as completely absent as it can possibly be from any piece of human workmanship," goes on to make admissions which show that the possibility is far from being complete. The *Iliad* is instinct with a certain "ardour" from beginning to end: "this ardour is what sets it apart from all other poetry."[1] In the *Odyssey* there is romance, a survival from the Middle Ages of Greece; there are personal touches, too, eloquent of personal experience. When we read of the "poor maid-servant in Ithaca who . . . had to go on grinding all night," we know that there is here

[1] *Lectures on Greek Poetry*, p. 38.

"a touch of something actual that had come to the poet himself and struck sharply through him the sense of the obscure labour and unsung pain that underlie the high pageant of life, war, and adventure." Later he speaks of the "incommunicable personal quality" which Theocritus brought to poetry, and in his Introduction to the *Greek Anthology* he traces the development of the psychological element down to Meleager, "so curiously akin to the mediæval poets."

The same critic tells us of Lucretius that "the poet's own extraordinary personality kindles his whole work"; and in his delightful book on Latin Literature he has sharply outlined the personal characters of the Roman lyrical poets: the "clear and almost terrible simplicity" with which Catullus expresses his own feeling, and "which is the essential charm of his lyrics": the "studied and unintermitted mediocrity" of Horace "only redeemed from dulness by the perpetual felicity": the reappearance in Propertius of the essential spirit of Meleager, his "abandonment to sensibility," his "absorption in self pity and the sentiment of passion": the "gentleness and sincerity" of Tibullus—that "Virgil without the genius": and the rhetoric, good humour, bad taste, and obstinate puerility of Ovid, so strangely beloved by the men of the Middle Ages and—less strangely perhaps—by the author of *Paradise Lost*. In these brilliant portraits there is no concealment of the subjective element, or of its vital importance.

I need not go on to trace the poetry of personal experience through the early ages of modern Europe.

While the Greek theory never quite faded out of memory, the practice of art gave it the lie everywhere, and nowhere so unhesitatingly as in England. The English poets were humble and assiduous borrowers of form, but what they borrowed they adapted without scruple, and their achievement, if not their purpose, was almost always personal. The time came when they even realised this consciously—the first sonnet of Sidney's *Astrophel and Stella* has been for three centuries the credo of English romanticism:

Loving in truth and fain in verse my love to show,
That she, deare Shee, might take some pleasure in my paine—
Pleasure might cause her reade, reading might make her know,
Knowledge might pitie winne, and pitie grace obtaine—
I sought fit words to paint the blackest face of woe,
Studying inventions fine, her wits to entertaine,
Oft turning others' leaves, to see if thence would flow
Some fresh and fruitful showers upon my sunburn'd brain.

But words came halting forth, wanting Invention's stay:
Invention, Nature's childe, fled stepdame Studie's blowes:
And others' feet still seemed but strangers in my way.
Thus great with child to speak, and helpless in my throwes,
Biting my trewand pen, beatinge myselfe for spite—
Foole, said my Muse to me, looke in thy heart and write.

If the language here is a little old-fashioned, the meaning is not; it is the same as that in Rossetti's *House of Life:*

By thine own tears thy song must tears beget,
O Singer! Magic mirror hast thou none
Except thy manifest heart; and save thine own
Anguish and ardour, else no amulet.

Cistern'd in Pride, verse is the feathery jet
Of soul-less air-flung fountains: nay, more dry
Than the Dead Sea, for throats that thirst and sigh,
That song o'er which no singer's lids grew wet.

But this, it may be said, is poetry, not argument: what of the controversy—the controversy has not been carried on in sonnets. True: but the poets have taken part in it, and their opinions, even in prose, have been expressed with great clearness and force. Let me first give a brief report of the debate, and then return to our illustrations.

"Personality *versus* impersonality in Art—how much or how little of one's self one may put into one's work: whether anything at all of it: whether one can put there anything else—is clearly a far-reaching and complex question." So Pater wrote,[1] but unfortunately the case of Prosper Merimée, which he was then considering, was one too simple and too limited to draw from the critic the far-reaching complex judgment which we should have followed with such spellbound interest. "Merimée," he contents himself with saying, "like his creations, had no atmosphere about him: gifted as he was with pure mind, with the quality which secures flawless literary structure, he had nothing of what we call *soul* in literature: hence also the singular harshness in his ideal" . . . "thus vindicating anew that much worn but not untrue saying that the style is the man—a man impassable, unfamiliar, impeccable . . . his personality is itself but an effective personal trait, and

[1] *Miscellaneous Studies*, p. 28.

transferred to art becomes a markedly peculiar quality of literary beauty." This comment is sufficient for its purpose: it makes the given exception prove the rule by showing that it is in reality no exception at all; but it is not an argument from principles. Elsewhere, however, Pater goes deeper. "Truth," he exclaims in his *Essay on Style*, "Truth—there can be no merit, no craft at all without that. And further, all Beauty is in the long run only *fineness* of truth, and what we call expression the finer accommodation of truth to that vision within." And again, "To give the phrase, the sentence, the structural member, the entire composition song or essay a similar unity with the subject and with itself—style is in the right way when it tends towards that. All depends upon the original unity, the vital wholeness and identity, of the initiatory apprehension or view." It is from this standpoint that his appreciation of Wordsworth is delivered.[1] "In much of what Wordsworth said in exaltation of rural life he was but pleading indirectly for that sincerity, that perfect fidelity to one's own inward presentations, to the precise features of the picture within, without which any profound poetry is impossible. . . . And so he has much for those who value highly the concentrated presentment of passion, who appraise men and women by their susceptibility to it, and art and poetry as they afford the spectacle of it."

This was certainly Wordsworth's own point of view: in the best known of his Prefaces he says, "All

[1] *Appreciations*, pp. 50, 51.

good Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings . . . by a man . . . who has also thought long and deeply. . . . Our thoughts are the representatives of all our past feelings." This leads on to the famous saying that "Poetry takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity." Still further on he says, "Its object is truth, not individual and local, but general and operative: not standing upon external testimony, but carried alive into the heart by passion." And in an Appendix, while discoursing on his favourite "Natural Diction," he says, "The earliest poets . . . wrote from passion excited by real events . . . feeling powerfully as they did, their language was daring and figurative . . . in succeeding times Poets, perceiving the influence of such language and desirous of producing the same effect without being animated by the same passion, set themselves to a mechanical adoption of these figures of speech . . . a language was thus produced differing materially from the real language of men in *any* situation."

The danger of forsaking the inner light, of relying on something external, something which is not the language of the heart's experience, the danger, or rather the impossibility, of severing expression from personality, was often present in the mind of Goethe. In one of his Conversations with Eckermann he says, "The style of a writer is a true impression of his inner self: if any one would write a clear style let him first have clearness in his soul, and if any one

would write a great style let him see to it that he has a great character."

In another Conversation he puts it even more strongly. "It is the personal character of the writer that brings his meaning before his readers, not the artifices of his talent." And in a passage quoted by Matthew Arnold he says, "The artist must work from within outwards, seeing that, make what contortions he will, he can only bring to light his own individuality . . . only in this way is it possible to be original."

Matthew Arnold himself was perhaps on this question a man of two moods: but he speaks decidedly enough in his essay on Joubert. "And yet," he asks, "what is really precious and inspiring, in all that we get from literature, except the sense of an immediate contact with genius itself?" He could hardly otherwise have accepted Joubert at all, for Joubert's is a very dogmatic creed. "Objects should never be described except for the purpose of describing the feelings which they arouse in us, for language ought to represent at the same moment the thing and the author, the subject and the thought. Everything that we say ought to be dyed with us, with the soul of us. This process is a long one, but it immortalises all."[1] This reminds us of Coleridge's "infallible test of a blameless style—its untranslateableness in words of the same language without injury to the meaning." "For," he added, "language is framed to convey not the object alone, but likewise the character,

[1] *Pensées*, p. 314.

mood and intentions of the person who is representing it."

I have chosen these quotations from a multitude of the same kind because they are thoroughly typical, and because, though they are all on the same side, they do not all cover exactly the same ground. The points they lay down are actually four. First, that in art there is no beauty but truth, truth of expression, fidelity to the personal vision. Second, that the basis of great poetry is originally and typically the recollection of personal experience. Third, that the perfect expression of our intuitions can only be achieved by a free personality, never by external means such as artifice of form or diction. Fourth, that the reason of this lies in the nature of language, which in literature is necessarily dyed with the personality of the writer.

There is nothing to surprise us in these opinions: they are reasonable and coherent, they are born of great minds and great experience, they fit precisely into the theory of poetical art which I have in a previous chapter been endeavouring to outline. Yet we have all met, and we shall no doubt again meet from time to time, with individual views and even with whole schools of criticism, which would seem at first sight to take a contradictory line throughout. The impersonal view of art, as it is called, appears in many forms—or rather there are many different opinions claiming that title, either singly or in very personal and characteristic groups. We need not, however, spend time in collecting them, for they are,

as it happens, all expressed in the writings of a single representative critic, and expressed, too, with the utmost possible force and conviction. For any one who happens to be interested both in literary method and in human nature, there can hardly be four more fascinating volumes than those which contain the Correspondence of Gustave Flaubert. The superficial reader will be at once either convinced or revolted, according to his temperament, by the vehemence of the preaching; those who have patience to analyse and compare the crucial passages will find that while Flaubert has rather disproved than proved his main thesis, he has in the process broken it up into its diverse elements and solved the problem piecemeal without knowing it.

Let us see, to begin with, what he has to say to our four propositions:

"There is no such thing as beautiful thought without beautiful form; and the converse is also true."[1]

"This is why there are neither beautiful subjects nor ugly ones, and why we can almost lay it down as an axiom, from the purely artistic point of view, that there are none such, style being in itself an absolute way of seeing things."

"Form is the very body of thought, just as thought is the soul of life."

"Poetry is but a way of perceiving external objects, a special organ which sifts matter, and without changing it yet transfigures it. Well, if you look at the world solely through this glass, the world will be

[1] *Correspondence*, i. 157.

coloured with its colour, and you will find that the words you choose for expressing your feelings will be in a kind of inevitable accord with the facts which called it forth."

These are unexceptionable articles of faith: Pater himself could not have hesitated to sign thirty-nine of them. In the next also Flaubert seems to be curiously near to Wordsworth:

"I must wait, and get some distance away from these impressions, if I am to be able to reproduce them to myself artistically, ideally, and so without risk either to myself or to what I am working at."

But this method, though sound in principle and constantly adopted by him in practice, was unfortunately inconsistent with the theory to which he had committed himself. The result was, as he naïvely confesses, a laborious struggle. "I am not working badly," he says on one occasion, "that is to say I am putting plenty of heart into it, but it is difficult to express well what one has never felt—it takes long preparatory studies and a devilish lot of brain-squeezing."[1] This arduous process he naturally avoided whenever he could—he even took sittings from his own family for his characters, and went long distances by train to acquire the experience of certain kinds of scenery.

Still, in spite of these and other inconsistencies, the great Impersonal Theory had him in its grip, and it is time to hear his statement of it. "There are," he says,[2] "two kinds of poets. The greatest, the rare

[1] *Correspondence*, ii. 149. [2] *Ibid.*, i, 180.

ones, the true masters, sum up humanity: they are not preoccupied with themselves or their own passions, they put their own personality into the background in order to absorb themselves in the personalities of others; they reproduce the Universe, which is reflected in their works with all its glitter and variety and multiplicity . . . there are others who have only to create, and they achieve harmony; to weep, and they move us; to think about themselves, and they are immortal. Possibly if they were to do anything else they might not go quite so far; but while they lack breadth they have ardour and dash: in short, if they had been born with a different temperament probably they would not have had genius at all. Byron was of this family, Shakespeare of the other: who can tell me what Shakespeare loved, betrayed, or felt? . . . Then at other times we are vain enough to believe that we, like Montaigne or Byron, have only to say what we think or feel in order to create beauty: and this last is perhaps the best plan for people who have originality."

This does not carry us very far, interesting though it is. The examples given do not bear examination. Shakespeare in his plays, his *Lucrece,* his *Venus and Adonis,* is no doubt more impersonal than Byron in *Manfred* or *Childe Harold:* but the Sonnets show conclusively that his method was objective or subjective, according to the work in hand. In *Venus and Adonis,* his art is merely plastic: in the Sonnets it is intimate and intense, a personal confession which becomes universal because of its deep sincerity, and because it is

"carried alive into the heart by passion." Byron was not more intimate or more intense: his inferiority lay in the fact that he was often trivial, flippant, irrelevant, and never knew it. He, and his imitator, Alfred de Musset, who was especially obnoxious to Flaubert, might well be quoted to warn us, not against the revelation of personality, but against the introduction of mere "personalities"—that is, of trivial and impertinent details or remarks—into a work of art. Then Montaigne, instead of helping Flaubert on this point, is a totally adverse witness. He *is* all details and remarks: but in his work of art they cannot be trivial or impertinent, for they are the book, and the book is Montaigne, the minute revelation of a personality.

There is, however, another famous page[1] in Flaubert's letters, which throws a further light upon the working of his mind here:

"Nothing is more feeble than to put personal feelings into a work of art. Follow this axiom out, step by step . . . you will see, I tell you, you will see how your horizon will widen . . . once sow your own self broadcast among them all, and your characters will live: instead of a personality everlastingly declaiming, and not able even to keep that up thoroughly, because it is continually running short of precise details, by reason of the disguises in which it travesties itself—instead of this, your works will give crowds of real human beings. How often have I been jarred by the poetising of what I would much

[1] *Correspondence*, ii. 75.

rather have had in its natural simplicity? Why put on the everlasting insipid expression of the poet—the more like the type it is, the nearer it gets to being a mere abstraction; that is to say, a thing anti-artistic, anti-plastic, anti-human, and therefore in reality anti-poetical, no matter how much word-craft you put into it."

"I mean to say," he goes on, "that if you follow this new line, you will soon perceive that you have suddenly gained centuries in maturity, and you will think it a pitiful method to sing about yourself. That comes off now and then in a single cry, but for all the lyrical gift of, say, Byron, how crushingly Shakespeare sweeps him aside with his more than human impersonality! You can't even tell whether he was grave or gay. The true artist should manage to make posterity believe that he never existed."

This is, I think, the really central passage in Flaubert's labyrinth of literary criticism. It is, of course, not a judgment in scientific form, delivered with responsibility—it is a volley of phrases fired off in an intimate letter, rapid, careless, combative. What it does is not in reality to lay down the right method—the right method has been plain enough since Shakespeare, to say nothing of Sophocles—but this repeated outbreak of Flaubert's is a challenge, a protest, against inartistic and vulgar writers of his own time. This protest is in its essence consistent with the principles of which I have already spoken. It may fairly be paraphrased as follows: It is feeble to drag into your work any feeling or opinion which does not

properly come within its artistic scope. The strong artist will put all his powers into his creation, and produce all his effect through it. He will not, as it were, stand beside his picture in person, advertising himself, and giving details, whether amusing or instructive, which are not to be found in his work or which are irrelevant to it. The true artist will try to make his audience forget that he has any existence outside his art. Above all, he will not pose: he will not claim to be listened to as a poet, because he takes "the poetic view." You cannot be a poet by profession, principle, formula, or convention. Every poet takes a poetic view—his own: there is no such thing as "the poetic view": it is a mere abstraction (like the Economic Man) a thing anti-human, anti-artistic, anti-poetical—because, we may surely add, it is impersonal.

There is, however, one more touch, one more point in the protest. The lyrical gift, the gift of "the single cry"—Flaubert felt bound to belittle that. It was so dangerous, and especially dangerous to himself. It might lead to gush, it might trouble his vision just when he most wanted to see life steadily and see it in detail. It was a weakness to which he knew himself liable. "There are in me," he says,[1] "literally two chaps quite distinct: one of them is all for throaty notes, lyrical moods, grand eagle-flights, every kind of sonorous phrase and top-high notion. The other digs and grubs with all his might for actuality—he

[1] *Correspondence*, ii. 69.

would like, if he could, to give you almost the physical sensation of the things he represents."

This, in my view, is the precise point where Flaubert, as a critic of literary method, wandered away from the belief which he so admirably expressed in his definition of style as "an absolute way of seeing things," and of poetry as "a way of perceiving external objects, which without changing, yet transfigures them." He is constantly, whenever he comes to this point in dealing with his own art, straying off into the delusive path of realism. He forgets that his work, too, was poetry: that if he looked at the world through his own glass it was natural and inevitable that it should take the color of his personality. He dreaded this colouring as a kind of distortion: he persuaded himself that he might, by a great and sustained effort, come to see things as they are in themselves, apart from any human vision of them.

"The less one feels a thing," he says,[1] "the more fitted one is to express it as it is—as it is always in itself, in its general aspect, and freed from all the contingencies of the moment—but then one must have the faculty of making oneself feel it. This faculty is simply the power of seeing, of keeping the model posed before oneself."

This reads like a paradox followed by a plausible explanation: but the point is elsewhere insisted upon.

"If you want to paint intoxication, love, women, or glory, my dear fellow, you must be neither drunkard, lover, husband, nor high-faluter. Once you get

[1] *Ibid.*, ii. 82.

mixed up with life, you see it confusedly, because it gives you too much pain or pleasure. The artist, on my theory, is a monstrosity, a being outside the pale of nature: all the miseries that Providence heaps upon him come from his obstinate determination to refute this axiom. The result is that he suffers himself, and makes others suffer for it."

And once more he exclaims, "I am a pen in human form!" This is no longer reconcilable with that other maxim to "Wait, and get some distance away from these impressions"—that maxim which seemed to base poetry, as Wordsworth based it, upon "Emotion recollected in tranquillity." It is consoling to note that Flaubert's moods were, at any rate, chaotic; they do not degenerate with time, they succeed one another haphazard, and in this particular instance the better opinion is, in fact, later than the worse one, though the worse one is quite as representative. It is clear that the conflict was a hard one: clear that this artist's miseries came from his determined efforts not to refute, but to establish, his axiom of insensibility or inexperience. "We must write more coldly," he says at one time, "let us be on our guard against this kind of heating process that goes by the name of inspiration": at another he grumbles: "My style is unequal and too methodical," or complains with astonished candour of some sixty-five pages, which he has just written, that "Each paragraph is, in itself, good, and there are, I am sure, some pages which are perfect: but for that very reason, the thing doesn't *go*—it is just a string of paragraphs."

Such are the troubles of that monstrosity, a pen in human form. Let us take leave of him in one of his more balanced moments.

"The dramatic form," he is saying, "has this in its favour, that it wipes out the author. The author," he adds, "should be in his work as God is in the Universe, present everywhere, visible nowhere. Art is a second world, and the creator of it should deal with it like the creator of the world of nature: in every atom, every aspect, there should be felt a power that is impassive, hidden, and infinite. The effect on the spectator should be to produce a kind of astonished wonder." [1]

It is a matter of common agreement that Shakespeare the Dramatist had a power that may be called infinite and hidden: infinite, because it is exhibited in a whole world of life: hidden, because it is exhibited only through the inhabitants of that world and never apart from them. But to add to this the words "impassive" or "impersonal" is a violent contradiction in terms. Activity and personality cannot be found anywhere in a higher degree than in Shakespeare's combination of creative force and ingenuous artistic concentration. He does not, like Flaubert, treat men as he would treat mastadons or crocodiles for a museum; he does not stuff them with straw; what he puts into them is that which is in himself, the breath of his own personality. So strong is the impression which he thus produces that critics like Dr. Brandes have believed it possible to trace in his works not

[1] *Correspondence*, ii. 155.

only the movements of his spirit, but the actual footprints of his external life. Others, finding always in his characters exactly what they find in the characters of the world around them, imagine that there must have been, over and above all these, a Shakespeare of whose character no record is left, a Shakespeare who succeeded in concealing himself. But Shakespeare's ingenuous concentration is the reverse of an attempt at concealment; it is the negation of a poise, a self-disguise, an adopted point of view. If he had a wider and more comprehensive vision of human life than Byron or other poets, if he treated it more tolerantly and was more completely absorbed in the study of it, that is only to say that he had a different and a more intense personality.

I do not hesitate to maintain this in the face of Flaubert's repeatedly expressed opinion, because, as I have already said, we have before us not only the Shakespeare of the Plays, but also the Shakespeare of the Sonnets, and the Sonnets are by universal admission among the most intimate of personal utterances. It has been less commonly remarked that they contain proofs of an intense interest in personality, the personality of others.

> What is your substance, whereof are you made
> That millions of strange shadows on you tend?

This is but the finest among many fine imaginative questionings, probings of the live dark in which the spirit moves and has its being: impassioned ventures

of the lover who holds that none can say more of his beloved

> Than this rich praise that you alone are you.

I am fortified also by the recollection of Milton, the master-builder of lofty verse, subduing to the strict form of his Epic all things in heaven and earth and hell—all things save his own spirit, never for a moment to be subdued or set aside. Milton as Man, Milton as Archangel, Milton as God—but the most characteristic voice of all is that of Milton as Satan, truly a double personality.

> "Is this the region, this the soil, the clime,"
> Said then the lost Archangel, "this the seat
> That we must change for Heaven? this mournful gloom
> For that celestial light?
> Farewell, happy fields
> Where joy for ever dwells: hail horrors, hail
> Infernal world, and thou profoundest Hell,
> Receive thy new possessor: one who brings
> A mind not to be changed by place or time.
> The mind is its own place, and in itself
> Can make a Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven."

Then there is Keats, a poet whom I should have had a malign pleasure in quoting to Flaubert if Fate had given me the opportunity. For Keats is of all our greater poets the most naturally and habitually objective in his method, the one whose power of song is most nearly matched by his power over form and colour. Also he was evidently and with full con-

sciousness devoted to his art. Yet at the very crisis, the supreme moment, of his *Endymion,* when the immortal lovers have achieved their immortal love, we see the still mortal form of John Keats standing between us and their dim cavern's mouth, lamenting his unworthiness to sing of them, and singing of himself—magnificently—instead:

> At which soft ravishment with doting cry
> They trembled to each other—Helicon!
> O fountain'd hill! Old Homer's Helicon!
> That thou wouldst spurt a little streamlet o'er
> These sorry pages, then the verse would soar
> And sing above this gentle pair, like lark
> Over his nested young: but all is dark
> Around thine aged top, and thy clear fount
> Exhales in mists to heaven. Ay! the count
> Of mighty Poets is made up: the scroll
> Is folded by the Muses; the bright roll
> Is in Apollo's hand: our dazed eyes
> Have seen a new tinge in the Western skies:
> The world has done its duty. Yet, oh! yet,
> Although the sun of poesy is set
> These lovers did embrace, and we must weep
> That there is no old power left to steep
> A quill immortal in their joyous tears.

I take pleasure in setting by the side of this a passage from one of the greatest poems of our own day, Hardy's *Dynasts.* The scene of Nelson's death is familiar to us all in Dr. Beatty's narrative: the poet has followed that narrative faithfully in its stark pathos, its poignant detail. But to that detail, that pathos, he has added, as it were, instinctively, almost

unconsciously, one touch more, unhistoric, but irrefutable:

"What are you thinking, that you speak no word?"

says the Admiral, and Hardy answers him thus:

"Thoughts all confused, my lord;—their needs on deck,
Your own sad state, and your unrivalled past,
Mixed up with flashes of old things afar—
Old childish things at home, down Wessex way,
In the snug village under Blackdon Hill,
Where I was born. The tumbling stream, the garden,
The placid look of the gray dial there,
Marking unconsciously this bloody hour,
And the red apples on my father's trees
Just now full ripe.

Will any one maintain that there is any loss to poetry, any less faithful service of art, because in that massive form by Nelson's deathbed, we can now see the presence not of one Thomas Hardy, but of two!

I pass on to the point of personal experience—of emotion actually recollected. Out of a countless number of examples I select two. The first must be Shelley's well-known poem beginning, "Away! the moor is dark beneath the moon." There is evidently here —not in the poem, but behind it—a story, sombre and passionate in a very moving degree. But the whole of this effect depends entirely upon the conviction that the story is true. An imaginary story may be moving, if it be told with sufficient art, with sufficient dramatic power, it may even perhaps be as

moving as a true story; but here there is no question of such a possibility, for the poem is so obscure that the story has not a chance—what moves us is the emotion of the poet, an emotion of remorse and despair which we can feel, though we are told nothing of its cause. We are told nothing of what has happened in this storm-darkened house, nothing of this friend and his "ungentle mood," or of this loving lady whose eye "so glazed and cold dares not entreat thy stay," or of the duty which calls to solitude and bids an everlasting farewell to peace. But the music is as haunting, as full of meaning to the soul, as it is unintelligible to the intellect:

The cloud-shadows of midnight possess their own repose,
For the weary winds are silent, or the moon is in the deep:
Some respite to its turbulence unresting ocean knows,
Whatever moves or toils or grieves hath its appointed sleep.
Thou in the grave shalt rest:—yet till the phantoms flee
Which that house and heath and garden made dear to thee erewhile,
Thy remembrance and repentance and deep musings are not free
From the music of two voices, and the light of one sweet smile.

We have the key to this riddle, if we cared to use it. But we do not care: we do not need the biography with names and dates; we have the full and sufficient certainty that this is the expression of a real love, a real separation, a real spiritual conflict.

For a second example I will turn to a living poet. In Mrs. Woods' poetical play *The Princess of Hanover* the following speech is put into the mouth of the old Electress, a lady of the eighteenth century, who, dramatically speaking, can only have been thinking of Queen Elizabeth. Yet who can doubt that these lines, so intense in their tender and high-hearted loyalty, are the living echo of scenes still living within the memory of the writer and of us who read?

What were it to be Queen of England? . . .
Consider
What 'twere to be a Queen,
A Queen of men, not marketable serfs.
Perchance you lean out from your balcony
One spring day in the prime and rapture of Youth,
And mark the immense crowd billowing beneath,
A sea of worshipping eyes, a ripple of hands
Claiming you theirs, lifting you to the height
Of their hearts' throne—all fathers, lovers, friends,
All yours and yours for ever.
These are the Immortals,
Not to be changed by mutability
Of the inconstant blood, or alienated
By circumstance, or in the unfeeling grave
To slumber careless.
You the years will change—
The small mechanic hours—you will grow old,
Dim-hearted, cinder-grey, will drop your playthings
One after one—Ay! but on any day
Choose you come forth, outstretching crooked hands
Like those Youth mocks, whispering with faded mouth
Such as men scorn, "My people," and lo! the Immortals!
A sea of worshipping eyes, a ripple of hands
Claiming you with the old rapture, lifting you

To the height of their hea rts' throne, yours as in Youth,
Yours on through age to death—sons, lovers, friends.
—This were for her that had a queen's heart.

It would be pleasant to go on: there are many poets among us, and most of them have written poems which would amply bear out what has been said. But there is a certain difficulty in citing one's own contemporaries, one's own friends, on this particular issue. I cannot call living witnesses by name and then, as it were, ask them for a public confession of personal experience. Their elegies, their love poems, their epithalamiums—all that I can here say of them is that the best are the most sincere, those which are most evidently historic records of a soul.

At this point, then, I leave the controversy—with the less regret because, as I said at the beginning, I believe it to be in reality an obsolete and illusory controversy. I do not by that mean to suggest that it was ever a question of words, a matter of form rather than of substance. The trivialities of the Byronics at one extreme, and the Parnassians at the other, remain to show the dangers to Poetry that really existed on both sides. But we have ended that dispute by mutual concessions: we have agreed that if the poet dips his pen (as he must do) into his own peculiar ink-pot, he must take care that it does not come up clogged with the dust of trivial affairs, affairs of the mere ego, that transitory inhabitant of the world of prose and sentimentality: agreed also that the more ingenuously he concentrates himself upon his art, the more surely will all that he produces be

dyed with the colour of his own vision. But when the old misunderstanding has thus been cleared away, the real movement behind only becomes more visible and more insistent: we see the long, inevitable, and now accelerated unfolding of art—art, which as a modern French writer has said, "s'en va toujours s'intériorisant," which more and more "works from within outwards" because it more and more clearly recognises the nature of its own activity and the opportunity before it. If I am right, our poetry—and I hope we may include that kind of poetry which is called fiction—will in the future neither seek to attain formal beauty by mechanical means, nor in any other way indulge that dream of the "pen in human form." To attempt "to see things as they are in themselves" is the splendid forlorn hope allotted to Science: it is no work for Poetry. The business of Poetry is to see spirits as they are, and all things as they are in the life of the spirit. This does not imply any forsaking of the ancient way, the way that great poetry has gone in all ages. There will be no forgetting the old beauty, the visible and audible beauty of the never-too-much-loved earth: but it will be remembered and loved as the half-translucent veil of that other beauty, the beauty that is true with the only truth and lasting with the only immortality that are given to us to know.

And it may be that that is not all: it may be that there is in poetry the power to reach a still deeper truth, a still profounder being, to draw at times directly from that unseen, unsounded, underlying

Pool of Personality, of which our own lives are but momentary jets flung into sunlight. Some among our poets have believed this and transmitted their belief, none in more beautiful lines than those of Mr. Binyon's *Renewal:*

There is no longer grief nor joy for me
But one infinity of life that flows
From the deep ocean heart that no man knows,
Out into these unnumbered semblances
Of earth and air, mountains and beasts and trees,
One timeless flood which drives the circling star
In furthest heaven, and whose weak waves we are,
Mortal and broken oft in sobbing foam,
Yet ever children of that central home,
Our Peace, that even as we flee, we find;
The Road that lies before us and behind,
By which we travel from ourselves, in sleep
Or waking, towards a self more vast and deep.

IV

POETRY AND POLITICS

THE relation of Poetry to social life—to Politics in the wider sense of the word—is not a very profound or difficult subject: but it is a little profounder, a little more difficult than it is sometimes thought to be. We have only to read or listen to what is being daily said around us to become aware that the common opinion divides poetry off from other human activities—regard it as an intruder in ordinary affairs. In the Ship of State, Poetry must not speak to the man at the wheel, or indeed to any member of the crew when engaged on any kind of duty: if she does speak she must not be listened to seriously. Common sense tells us that Poetry is idealism, and that idealism has nothing to do with the practical.[1] For that you need reality, truth, knowledge of things as they are in themselves: and only Science, which is the antithesis of Poetry, can give you these. Science

[1] "As to the plaintiff's verses that had been quoted, the jury could not judge the verses of poets from the standpoint of business men such as the jury and himself. Poets dealt with these matters in extravagant strain, as was shown by their knowledge of the poets.

"The learned counsel then recited a poem by Swinburne and Shakespeare's Sonnet No. 20. These poets were to be congratulated that they had not to be cross-examined by Mr. Campbell."—*The Times*, April 22, 1913.

then must be in supreme command, Science must steer and work the ship, while Poetry, if she is allowed any active place at all, must be restricted to such employment as decorating the saloon and playing in the band.

Now it can hardly be necessary for me to insist on the vital importance of this view. Its results are visible in every department of our social system, and they are always disastrous. Our public life is before all things chaotic and quarrelsome—the crew are busying themselves not so much in working the ship as in disputing about every detail of the voyage, and particularly about its course. In Government, our method is to move by alternate efforts in almost opposite directions:

> You have, perchance, observed the inebriate's track
> At night when he has quitted the inn-sign:
> He plays diversions on the homeward line,
> Still that way bent, albeit his legs are slack.[1]

Then on questions of public morality there is a direct and bitter conflict always going on: in matters of religion the common ideal of brotherhood is forgotten in the universal ardour for faction-fighting. Yet the nation thus distracted is a collection of men and women perhaps as homogeneous as any in the world, and certainly in no way unusually deficient in political, moral, or religious sense. They are merely confused, and their confusion is, I believe, largely due to a radical misunderstanding of the nature of Poetry and the part it plays in human life.

[1] George Meredith, *The World's Advance.*

To realise this we must go a little further back—we must look into the prevalent view of our knowledge of the world in which we live. That view is a clear and positive one: it is held by the vast majority around us, and I believe that the following statement of it would be generally accepted. First then, bodily existence, material existence, is existence in the truest sense of the word, and all true existence is primarily material existence: as compared with this outward life, our inner life is unreal, and it most nearly attains reality when it most closely corresponds to outward existence. Secondly, our only true knowledge is knowledge of the external world, and it is true because it is knowledge of things as they are in themselves, knowledge of real and not imaginary things. It follows that our knowledge of our bodies is more intimate and certain than our knowledge of our souls can possibly be.

This is the belief of a generation bred up on Science, but it is not one which is warranted by Science. What Science has to say in the matter may be found very clearly stated in Huxley's essay on Descartes.[1] "What then is certain," he asks. "Why, the fact that the thought, the present consciousness, exists. . . . Thus thought is existence. More than that, so far as we are concerned, existence is thought, all our conceptions of existence being some kind or other of thought." Having said so much, the recollection seems to break in upon him that he is outraging the common belief—the creed which I have

[1] *Collected Essays*, vol. i. p. 172.

set forth above. He continues, "Do not for a moment suppose that these are mere paradoxes or subtleties. A little reflection upon the commonest facts proves them to be irrefragable truths. For example, I take up a marble, and I find it to be a red, round, hard, single body . . . all those qualities are modes of our own consciousness. . . . Whatever our marble may be in itself, all that we can know of it is under the shape of a bundle of our own consciousness. Nor is our knowledge of anything we know or feel, more or less than a knowledge of states of consciousness."

He goes on to deal with the question of the correspondence between the external world and our impressions. "The necessary outcome of his (Descartes') views is what may properly be called Idealism: namely, the doctrine that, whatever the universe may be, all we can know of it is the picture presented to us by consciousness. This picture may be a true likeness—though how this can be is inconceivable—or it may have no more resemblance to its cause than one of Bach's fugues has to the person who is playing it: or, than a piece of poetry has to the mouth and lips of a reciter. It is enough for all the practical purposes of existence if we find that our trust in the representations of consciousness is verified by results: and that by this help we are enabled 'to walk surefootedly in this life.'"

Finally he has this passage[1] on body and soul. "Thus it is an indisputable truth that what we call the material world is only known to us under the

[1] *Collected Essays*, vol. i. p. 193.

forms of the ideal world: and, as Descartes tells us, our knowledge of the soul (taken as the sum of the states of consciousness of the individual) is more intimate and certain than our knowledge of the body." In Huxley's opinion then, the common belief is wrong on every point.

It is impossible to read this essay without being reminded that the poets have said the same thing and said it more memorably: there is Coleridge's Ode:

> O Lady! we receive but what we give,
> And in our life alone does Nature live.

There is George Meredith's Sonnet, opening with the lines:

> Earth was not Earth before her sons appeared,
> Nor Beauty Beauty ere young Love was born.

And there are many more.

But the poets use a truth such as this for their own purposes, which are not for the moment ours. We are not now looking for beauty on the hillside, we are climbing to reach a particular point of view and our best way is the plainest and straightest. Let us for a short time longer proceed by the direct, rough-hewn steps of prose. We start from the point to which Huxley has brought us. Man, as we know him, is a spirit: and it is only in terms of spirit that he is capable of knowing the world.

We have already observed him in the process of acquiring knowledge, we have seen that this process

is not a passive one: an impression or sensation is something which is offered to us by the external world, but it will pass us by if we do not, by an activity of the spirit, seize it, and present it to our consciousness.

The activity by which this is done is the æsthetic activity. When we grasp an impression, an external appearance, and present it, or express it tacitly, to our consciousness, we create a perception of intuition. When we express a perception or intuition in an external form, we make a work of art: if the expression is in the form of words, the work of art is poetry; not necessarily verse, but essential poetry, that is creation.

We have also seen that there is another activity of the human spirit—the logical or intellectual activity. By it man takes his intuitions and of them makes comparisons, classes, generalisations, and deductions: the expression of these in words is essential prose, that is, Science.

Having then these two theoretic activities, which express themselves in Poetry and Science, how does man use them? Does he keep them distinct? Obviously not. Science deals with what are called facts, observed and recorded facts: but, as we have seen, these have in themselves the nature of poetry, they are facts of a world not discovered, but created, by the spirit. Science, in short, is dependent for its material on a poetic activity.

Is Poetry on its side dependent on Science? Practically it is. It is true that Art can dispense with

logical thought—it does so to a great extent in the case of painting, and even Poetry might conceivably be limited to the expression of pure perception:

The sun is warm, the sky is clear,
The waves are dancing fast and bright;
Blue isles and snowy mountains wear
The purple noon's transparent might,
The breath of the moist air is light
Around its unexpanded buds:
Like many a voice of one delight
The winds, the birds, the ocean floods,
The City's voice itself is soft, like Solitude's.

This is almost entirely expressive of direct impressions, and it charms us: but it would cease to charm if it were indefinitely prolonged or constantly repeated. The lines are not a poem, they are only the introductory stanza of a poem which includes reflections and comparisons, as well as simple intuitions. And this is the case in the greater number of poems: Poetry has the power of taking the finished products of Reason for her raw material, and fusing them together with her own intuitions into one substance. For a single clear example of this, Wordsworth's little poem on the death of Lucy will suffice:

A slumber did my spirit seal;
I had no human fears:
She seemed a thing that could not feel
The touch of earthly years.

No motion has she now, no force,
She neither hears nor sees;
Rolled round in earth's diurnal course,
With rocks and stones and trees.

These last two lines come from no simple intuition: man is not capable of a direct perception of the earth's daily revolution. To human sense it is the Sun which moves—which rises and sets to make our earthly years. But Science has told us a different tale, and the tale of Science has been so mastered by the imagination as to become of one substance with our intuitions. Poetry has made thought, too, a subject for the æsthetic activity.

This then is, in very brief outline, what I believe to be the true account of the relations between Poetry and Science, and if we could now come together upon a scientific definition of Poetry, we should have only two stages further to go to arrive at our desired point of view. The definition we seem to have reached is this: Poetry is the expression in speech, more or less rhythmical, of the æsthetic activity of the human spirit, the creative activity by which the world is presented to our consciousness. But this is not enough: it gives us only Poetry in the abstract, and makes no distinction between good and bad, greater and lesser poetry. The two necessary further stages are these: good poetry is not merely the expression of our intuitions, it is the masterly expression of rare, complex and difficult states of consciousness: and great poetry, the poetry which has power to stir many men and stir them deeply, is the expression of our consciousness of this world, tinged with man's universal longing for a world more perfect, nearer to the heart's desire. By definition, and in a plain, prosaic way, we are all poets, all makers of our own world:

but the great poets re-make it for us; they take this very world of time in which we live, and by an incantation they rebuild it for us, so that for an instant we see it under a light that is not the light of Time. This at least is what I find they have always done in their great moments, and what I do not doubt they will always do.

> For, an ye heard a music, like enow
> They are building still, seeing the City is built
> To music: therefore never built at all,
> And therefore built for ever.

Those who have followed me so far and come to the same standpoint will now, I believe, find it easy enough to make a survey of our social system and mark what is and what ought to be the place of Poetry in it. I will imagine that a small company at any rate are still with me, and that we are looking down together upon the world of our modern life—looking not only upon it but into it, into the true nature of its activities. What do we see? Are there before us two clearly separated regions, in one of which the only activity going on is logical or scientific, while in the other there is only the creative and emotional? Do we see men divided as it were into two distinct nations—Men of Thought and Men of Feeling—the one speaking the language of Science, the other that of Poetry? Surely not. Do we not rather see a territory throughout the main part of which both languages are in common use, while on the extreme opposite outskirts of it there are two com-

paratively small areas within which men are to be found speaking and working, on this side in the language of pure Reason, on the other in that of pure Instinct? We see also, I think, if we have the full use of our eyes, that though both these exclusive little areas are desirable places, no one could and no one does, with any success, live entirely in either of them. No one, however artistic, spends all his time in the enjoyment of his æsthetic intuitions, untroubled by remembrance or forethought or comparison. No one, however strict and powerful a thinker, passes every moment of his life in the pursuit of Science or under the absolute direction of Reason.

No. Art is a place apart, and Science is a place apart; the place where men live is not in either of these, but in the larger space between them, where we speak and understand two languages at once, because we are by birth of a double nationality, and inherit, in varying degrees, the powers of both. It is true that in our present stage of civilisation one of these nationalities is apt to encroach upon the other, even to assume a dominant position. When we define man as "a reasoning animal," we are in danger of forgetting that "animal" too is part of the definition: that we are creatures of instinct first and of reason afterwards. In our long march out of the wilderness we have owed it to Reason that we men, alone of all living tribes, have come through to the conquest of the world. We therefore continue, now that the conquest is practically accomplished, to set Reason in the

place of supreme authority, and we give wider scope and more compelling powers to that authority whenever a fresh emergency arises. This may be very right and necessary, but there are two considerations of a modifying kind which I think might well be pressed upon the partisans of pure Reason.

The first is that Government has long been admitted to exist only for the happiness of the Governed, and not for the satisfaction of the Governor. It would seem to follow from this that strictly scientific enactments, though perhaps highly pleasing to their inventor, may not be really the most suitable to a society nearly every member of which is, on one side of his nature, an alien to science, full of illogical and often passionate preferences. In the Alsace-Lorraine of our daily life, negotiations which are demonstrated to be for our good may not always be for our happiness, and we may come to resent the dominant power which says to us: "You have lost your double nationality; so far as you were born of instinct, of art, of poetry, you are now a disinherited and subject race."

The second consideration is this: that for our rulers to listen too exclusively to the strict counsel of Reason would be to fail in duty to those who gave them their authority. There is much to be said against our modern party system, but there is one strong point to be urged in its favour, and that is that the line of cleavage is not between Reason and Instinct, Science and Poetry, Utilitarianism and Idealism. It is between two Ideals, both highly poetical.

I will not cease from mental fight,
Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand
Till we have built Jerusalem,
In England's green and pleasant land.

That is the vow which binds equally the devoted of both parties: but for the conservative, so far as he is truly Conservative, the Holy City was built somewhere in the past and comes down to us only to be saved or restored: while for the Liberal, so far as he is truly Liberal, its site lies still ahead upon a beautiful but misty horizon, and the City is the more difficult to describe because the like of it has not yet been seen on earth. I must add that, in addition to the two original and probably ultimate parties, there arise others from time to time, whose Future State is a kind of Utopia and is to be looked for round the next corner. It will be built of none but solid prose materials, and it might, we are told, be finished tomorrow if only the designers had sufficient legislative power at their disposal.

Unhappily, the jerry-builders of Utopia are not singular in this last illusion. The belief in legislation, the belief that our fellows had better be sober than free, is probably the greatest danger that civilisation has to fear at the present day, and the only aid that we can invoke against it is that of Poetry. There are but two ways of dealing with men in the mass—persuasion and compulsion. Reason, no longer sweet Reason, but the relentless virago more properly named Logic, seems to have elected for compulsion. It remains only for Poetry to keep to the longer and

surer way, however our would-be legislators clamour for the short, half-laid road, so full of unexpected pitfalls, and so cruelly uphill for those who are to be driven along it. This way is clean against human nature. We are all—Conservatives, Liberals, Socialists—we are all revolutionists now: but the true and lasting Revolutions are achieved by a change of feeling and not of statute law. To awaken, stimulate, and change human feeling is the great function of Poetry, and the Poet is exerting a hundred times more beneficent power when he is doing this than he could ever exert in the more prosaic office of a legislator.

The history of our literature affords a very striking example of this. Joseph Addison's poem *The Campaign* was written when he was a young and poor man. It is still remembered for two lines which both occur in the description of a great general:

'Twas then great Marlborough's mighty soul was proved,
That, in the shock of charging hosts unmoved,
Amidst confusion, horror, and despair,
Examined all the dreadful scenes of war:
In peaceful thought the field of death surveyed,
To fainting squadrons sent the timely aid,
Inspired repulsed battalions to engage,
And taught the doubtful battle where to rage.
So when an angel by divine command
With rising tempests shakes a guilty land
(Such as of late o'er pale Britannia past),
Calm and serene he drives the furious blast,
And, pleased the Almighty's orders to perform,
Rides in the whirlwind and directs the storm.

Judged by a modern standard, *The Campaign* is not great or even good poetry, but it had the full effect of poetry upon Addison's contemporaries. It showed them England and Englishmen, Queen, Ministers, and Generals, all in the act of life, but with their characters and deeds transfigured in a pseudo-heroic atmosphere. It moved them, it transported them from the mood of criticism into the mood of enthusiasm: it showed the writer to be gifted with the power of persuasion. The Government realised this and fell into the natural fallacy of prosaic minds: they secured his services and then used him for quite other purposes. For twelve years he spent his time in lucrative appointments, sessions of Parliament, and high Offices of State. In these he made only a subordinate figure: but in the one interval when he was out of office he achieved the triumph of his life by the introduction of *Cato,* and by the perfect expression of his own personality in the *Spectator,* he worked a lasting change in the thought and feeling of the nation. This is a lesson for the modern Poet: if his poems should achieve so much success as not only to influence the public but even to attract the attention of the Government, he will none the less resist all attempts to turn him into a Secretary of State: he will probably—though this is less certain—refuse even to become a member of the House of Lords. He will not forsake poetry, nor will he attempt to use poetry in the service of particular interests. The conflicts of policy he will judge, not by pitting arguments against each other, but by measuring each against the ideal

which is common to both sides. Those who hear him will be reminded not of their differences but of the underlying sympathetic aspirations which are not partisan or temporary, but national and imperishable. A political poem of this kind is that famous sonnet of Wordsworth's, which keeps its power to this day, though the particular occasion which called it forth has long been forgotten:

> It is not to be thought of that the flood
> Of British freedom, which to the open sea
> Of the world's praise, from dark antiquity
> Hath flowed "with pomp of waters unwithstood"—
> Roused though it be full often to a mood
> Which spurns the check of salutary bands—
> That this most famous stream in bogs and sands
> Should perish; and to evil and to good
> Be lost for ever. In our halls is hung
> Armoury of the invincible knights of old:
> We must be free or die, who speak the tongue
> That Shakespeare spake, the faith and morals hold
> Which Milton held.—In everything we are sprung
> Of Earth's first blood, have titles manifold.

It would be difficult to say whether this poem is more proudly conservative or more passionately democratic. But it lasts, because it is not partisan. Unfortunately, this is seldom the case with political poems: they do not take their origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity, but only too often from just the emotion one would not wish to recollect in tranquillity. Such was Coleridge's Eclogue of *Fire, Famine, and Slaughter,* a poem repented by its

author within a few years, and now absolutely obsolete. It is instructive to note that Pitt, who in this frenzy of political hatred is consigned by Coleridge to everlasting flames, is the same statesman for whose "hallowed tomb" Scott wrote an Ode of a precisely opposite character. But even this is less striking than the contrast between two sonnets written in our own time by two great poets upon the same day—the day after the assassination of the Tsar Alexander. Swinburne, but for stern compassion and deep awe, would rejoice

> That one more sign is given against the crown,
> That one more head those dark red waters drown,
> Which rise round thrones whose trembling equipoise
> Is propped on sand and bloodshed and such toys
> As human hearts that shrink at human frown.

Rossetti sees in the murdered man no tyrant, but the emancipator of forty million serfs, lamented by his people:

> These to-day aloud
> Demand of Heaven a father's blood—sore bowed
> With tears and thrilled with wrath; who while they grieve
> On every guilty head would fain achieve
> All torments by his edicts disallowed.

These poems each expressed an unconsidered view of a mere particular fact: they give us no insight into the colossal and mysterious tragedy of the Russian Autocracy: they were momentary and they passed with the passing of the moment. But Rossetti, at any

rate, had a power beyond this. His sonnet "On Refusal of Aid between Nations," written on some unremembered occasion, can never be obsolete while indignation and generosity remain to us. It expresses a deep sense of the divine wrath, which comes, he says, not from the calamities of the time—

> But because man is parcelled out in men
> To-day: because for any wrongful blow
> No man not stricken asks, "I would be told
> Why thou dost thus," but his heart whispers then
> "He is he, I am I." By this we know
> That our earth falls asunder, being old.

The view which I have here suggested will not commend itself to the majority of those engaged in public life. The politician desires support, the elector desires guidance, on the particular question of the day: they cannot wait for any ripening process. Their charge against Poetry will be that it is too remote, that its method of persuasion is not direct enough, that it has too little touch with "practical politics." If we could induce them to come for a moment to our point of view and look down, as we have done, upon the common everyday life of men, half instinctive and half intellectual, might we not say to them: "There is the world you have to govern: on what power are you relying for persuasion? First, no doubt, on Reason—but your opponents will claim Reason too. And even those who come to hear you will not perhaps be effectively gained by pure cold logic: what you need is to create enthusiasm, a fire

that will burn and spread after you have passed on. Will you set aside as too remote, too unpractical, those deep and permanent emotions which belong to the innermost activity of the spirit, and which have probably before now made your own imagination glow? Then you must attempt to kindle an emotion with the practical details of the matter in hand: you must appeal to the self-interest of your audience and their hatred of those who baulk it. You, too, will be remaking the world: half of it will be turned to baseness by your imagination, and the other half by assenting to it. This also is a kind of poetic activity: out of human life it builds the City of Dis."

Here, too, we have an example worth remembering. This charge of remoteness has been anticipated by a living poet. The thought came to Mr. Yeats in his early days, that he might in time to come be reproached for not having done more for the cause of Ireland. It was not, of course, moonlighting that might be expected of him, nor even speeches in favor of Home Rule, but good political verse, denouncing the oppressor, instead of unpractical poetry about that Lady Beauty, whose presence keeps alive the souls of nations. These are the first lines of his Apologia:

> Know that I would accounted be
> True brother of that company
> Who sang to sweeten Ireland's wrong
> Ballad and story, rann and song;
> Nor be I any less of them
> Because the red rose-bordered hem

Of her whose history began
Before God made the angelic clan
Trails all about the written page,
For in the world's first blossoming age
The light fall of her flying feet
Made Ireland's heart begin to beat,
And still the starry candles flare
To help her light foot here and there,
And still the thoughts of Ireland brood
Upon her holy quietude.

The poems here defended—Mr. Yeats's Irish poems—are certainly very remote: I suppose none ever touched more distantly or more obliquely a question of contemporary political strife: none ever appealed less to the selfish fears and hates of men. But I believe they have done more for Ireland than all the threats and curses of the last hundred years. Is this what it is to be unpractical?

What else is wisdom?—what of men's endeavour
Or God's high grace, so lovely and so great?
To stand from fear set free, to breathe and wait,
To hold a hand uplifted over hate;
And shall not Loveliness be loved for ever?[1]

What Poetry can do, then, is to express not our transitory wishes, but our eternal aspirations: she designs, but she cannot argue about details. That is the work of Reason, scientific, dispassionate, honourably prosaic. On the other hand, the Poet must not be so remote as to be no longer human. He, like the rest of us, is earth-born, and must never

[1] Gilbert Murray, *Bacchæ*.

deny his double nature. If he builds an ideal world for us, he must use the material of our actual life: otherwise he fails, he leaves us cold, we refuse to enter into his alien and unattractive Paradise. This explains the astonishing weakness of our religious poetry. We might have supposed that Art would have been at her most powerful when dealing with Religion; and this expectation is amply borne out by the history of painting in Europe. But it is hardly to be disputed that in this country at least religious poetic activity has been for the most part a feeble and mechanical activity, only saved from total failure by the aid of music and other extraneous associations. I am speaking now of poetic activity in the wider sense, of the creative imagination, whether working through prose or verse; but only as it deals with the social aspect of religion, and mainly of its operations in verse. Its endeavours have been made with too little regard for the double nature of man: it has tried not so much to remake this world as to make a new one out of unfamiliar or misplaced materials: it has invented a Paradise which is not a transfiguration of this life, but an irrelevant sequel to it.

I will not quote from the religious verse in which this conception has been so often uttered, because, though it is mainly rubbish, I cannot forget that even a bit of rubbish may be endeared to some one by an accidental memory, a fragrance conveyed by it though not issuing from its own substance. But I do not need to quote: the feeling of alienation caused by this too unearthly ideal is well known to most of

us. It was twice expressed by Mary Coleridge in her poems—expressed with perfect reverence and perfect sincerity. First, she declares[1] that she loves the Earth she knows more than the Heaven of the Hymnal:

Is that the home, the Father kind,
  Is that the country of our birth?
Were we created deaf and blind,
  That we prefer the toilsome earth?

Its setting sun, its changing sea,
  The day, the dark refreshing night,
The winds that wander wide and free
  Are dearer than the Land of Light.

More than this: she loves even the labour of this world better than the restful monotony of that other:[2]

I envy not the dead that rest,
  The souls that sing and fly;
Not for the sake of all the Blest,
  Am I content to die.

My being would I gladly give,
  Rejoicing to be freed;
But if for ever I must live,
  Then let me live indeed.

What peace could ever be to me
  The joy that strives with strife?
What blissful immortality
  So sweet as struggling life?

Among the few hymns to be excepted from this condemnation of futility is that anonymous one—not

[1] *Poems*, p. 95. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 198.

to be found in many of the modern books for church use—in which, among all the old conventional splendours borrowed from the gorgeous East and to us almost senseless, among the walls of precious stones and turrets of carbuncles and streets paved with pure gold, we come suddenly upon a touch like this:

> Thy gardens and thy gallant walks
> Continually are green;
> There grow such sweet and pleasant flowers
> As nowhere else are seen.

It is only to touch: but it is convincing because, though other-worldly, it is still human: it has still something of our own, something that is a memory as well as a hope. In this it obviously resembles the far greater poetry from which it is derived—the poetry of the ancient Hebrews. We are told that the ancient Hebrews had no thought of personal immortality, but they had a passionate belief in an eternal excellency, and they embodied their ideal in the visible beauty of their own city.

> The hill of Sion is a fair place, and the joy of the whole earth: upon the north side lieth the city of the great King: God is well known in her palaces as a sure refuge.
> Walk about Sion and go round about her: and tell the towers thereof. Mark well her bulwarks, set up her houses: that ye may tell them that come after.
> For this God is our God for ever and ever: he shall be our guide unto death.

This union of the fervour of patriotism with the fervour of moral aspiration produced a poetry which

is to all our liturgical poetry as a great and sonorous bell is to the vague whistle of the wind. It rings to the height of heaven, but it was cast in the bowels of earth. Therefore it has in all generations moved men as no other poetry has ever moved them.

There is another reason for the influence of the Psalms: they do not attempt to do the work of prose. They do not deal in history or argument: they do not, as our hymns often do, support particular dogmas, or illustrate the Calendar of a particular Church, or justify the authority of a particular hierarchy. They are, in short, remote—remote from practical religious politics: but that is only to say that they have fed the deeper springs of human emotion and exercised an unparalleled power in moments of crisis. Before our society can hope to produce such poetry as this, we must learn to clear our vision and see, as we hardly see at present, what is the true nature of the religious ideal and how it is related to our common life.

> What's a religion? 'Tis a poet's dream
> Done into deadly prose by earnest men,
> Stript of the charm, the madness, and the gleam
> Of highest reason, by the industrious pen.
>
> 'Tis Quixote's chivalry—in Sancho's brain
> Turning to islands where himself may rule—
> Knight-errant wandering through too real a Spain,
> Misapprehended by the faithful fool,
> Scorned by the strong, derided by the proud,
> Played with by Fashion, battered by the Crowd.[1]

[1] *Verse*, by Bernard Holland, 1912, p. 144.

Lastly, there is one more problem of our social life which troubles us from time to time, and which comes within the range of our present survey: the problem of the relation of poetry, of creative Art, to public morality. This, too, will have a different and, I think, a less confusing appearance if we view it from the standpoint which I have tried to indicate. It is not so simple a question as that of the relation of Poetry to Politics and Religion, because it is not concerned only with perception and reason, but with a third force in human life, an activity which is not æsthetic or intellectual.

> The Senses, loving Earth or well or ill,
> Ravel yet more the riddle of our lot.

That is to say, they are not content with theoretic existence, they take man out of the sphere of pure being into that of doing, getting, becoming: they make him a moral as well as an instinctive and reasoning animal.

The way in which the problem presents itself is this. So long as a man keeps entirely to himself and his private circle the expression of his own intuitions—that is, the works of art which he creates—no one could possibly claim to pass any judgment upon them. But when an artist exhibits his work to his fellow-citizens, when a poet multiplies and distributes his poems, it becomes a matter of practical interest to the community in which he lives to observe what effect, if any, is produced by them. In Politics and cases of religious controversy this anxiety does not

arise, because the approval of at least one party is secured; but there is no party which does not desire good public morals, though there may be disagreement as to the best method of achieving the desired result. The inquiry then is legitimate, but though some make it coolly, others make it with apprehension, and often fall into error. Sometimes, for instance, they exclaim against a book as "immoral" because it supplies arguments against an established institution, such as the institution of marriage.

Here they forget that as a community we in England have agreed to permit all institutions to be publicly criticised: a man may, if he wishes, advocate the abolition of the Church, the Post Office, the House of Lords, or any other institution. If he does this seriously and disinterestedly in a book, we may regret the existence of such opinions and dread their propagation, but we have no right to do anything but controvert them. If, however, the book claims to be a work of art, we are entitled to say that it is faulty, because argument is the business of Science, of Reason, of Prose in the true sense, not of Poetry. Poetry does not *advocate* a new world: it instantly and of its own power *creates* a new world. What happens or is done or thought or said in that world can have no direct reference to the affairs of our everyday life. This is easily and very generally perceived in the case of rhythmical poetry: the form of the verse, and perhaps some peculiarity of diction, removes what we hear to a distance from the prose world. But in the common unrhythmical fiction, where too the subject-

matter, the raw material, is drawn very directly from everyday experiences and expressed in language approximating to the language of ordinary life, there, however creative, however essentially poetic the work is, however truly it makes a new world out of the old, there is a risk of a mistaken identification, of a confusion between the two. And the risk is perhaps greatest when the art is most moving, for that is when it transfigures life most, and yet changes it least: the common mind then easily perceives the similarity and overlooks the difference. Yet it is the difference and not the similarity that is the more important: the fallacy lies in taking the similarity for identity. This confusion is due to that inveterate belief that Art is a description, reproduction, or imitation, of things as they are. When we have freed ourselves from this unscientific delusion, and realised the true function of Poetry, those who read will cease to regard fiction as a highly rhetorical method of advocacy, and those who write will perhaps remember too that they cannot be artistic and argumentative at the same time.

It is possible, then, for art to be bad art: is it not possible for it to be bad morals, to be dangerous to the community? I do not doubt that it is: there may be danger of the worst, and when it exists it will be a much more insidious danger than that commonly apprehended. Information does not corrupt, nor does argument: if they did, Science would be the most dangerous of all influences, and there have been times and places in which it was so considered. What cor-

rupts or may corrupt is contact with a corrupt personality. Now contact with a personality is precisely what Art gives. The Poet, the artist, takes you into his new world. What you see or hear there may be painful or pleasant, but it cannot in itself be harmful: it is merely a kind of spiritual experience. But the atmosphere of that world, the quality of the imagination you breathe there, the unseen but all-pervading presence of the creative spirit, that is a vital matter.

What we should ask, then, when these moments of apprehension come, is not, "What does this book advocate? What does it attack? What painful incidents does it narrate: what plain or uncomfortable words does it use?" The inquiry should go deeper: it should be, "What is this writer's personality? Is it disinterested or selfish, fine or base?" And to this it would very seldom be difficult to find the right answer if the right evidence were taken. That is not to be done by gathering isolated words, or passages, taking them out of one world and bringing them back to another—they may very likely be quite out of key here, as many persons and events in history are out of key with the life of to-day, and yet we do not demand that they should be expunged from the record. No, it is only by taking the book as a whole, and the man behind the book, by observing not mere details, but the indwelling soul which gives them life and unity, that we can estimate the possible moral effect. The danger, when there is danger, comes not from what is startling, what is called shocking, but from what is

insidious. That which shocks, whether good or evil, calls forth a natural resistance: that which permeates does not, though it may be the most powerful influence in a life and the most indelible. I will set down here a quotation from the literature of a generation ago. I do not know the author's name or whether he is still alive: but in truth no one man is responsible for the work in question, because being a piece written for the theatre, it was in reality the result of a kind of collaboration between the author and his audience. I take it as typical of the world which they created by the demand and supply of this and similar expressions. In that world the ideal man addresses the ideal woman as follows:

> I come as a cavalier,
> And I think you'd take it not amiss
> I do as a cavalier,
> Who is never loth to steal a kiss.
> And never a cavalier
> Would be a gallant knight and true,
> Who wouldn't confer a kiss
> Upon a girl who wished him to.

This is an isolated fragment? It is. I have no space for more. But my memory tells me that in the generation in which it was written it was popular and representative. My memory also tells me that in the same generation loud cries of denunciation were hurled against a book call *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. To-day there is a great change: we know that book. We have forgotten the shock it gave; we have not forgotten the pain, but it no longer troubles us,

because we have learnt to share it. We know the spirit that in that world cries for beauty, and, above all, for moral beauty. Is it there or in the "gallant cavalier" atmosphere that the soul may breathe with least danger? And if vulgarity, baseness of thought and feeling, is the real enemy, the real disease which softens and eats away the tissues of the mind, is it not true that Science and Art are its two antidotes, and Art, great Art, the stronger of these?

Yes, stronger, because while Science clarifies thought by rejecting Emotion, Poetry refines it by intensifying Emotion. When thought and sense are fused together by genius, all that is really mean or common is imperceptibly thrown off: the sorrow remains as noble sorrow, the laughter as pure laughter. The heart has learnt wisdom, but has kept innocency.

> O mighty Muse, . . .
> Earthborn of suffering, that knowest well
> To call thine own, and with enamouring spell
> Feedest the stolen powers of god-like youth
> On dear imagination's only truth,
> Building with song a temple of desire:
> And with the yearning music of thy quire,
> In nuptial sacrament of thought and sense
> Hallowest for toil the hours of indolence:
> Thou in thy melancholic beauty drest
> Subduest Ill to serve thy fair behest,
> With tragic tears, and sevenfold purified
> Silver of mirth: and with extremest pride,
> With secret doctrine and unfathomed lore
> Remainest yet a child for evermore.[1]

[1] Robert Bridges, "Recollections of Solitude."

Of Poetry this is certainly true, and none the less because the poet draws so much of his power from sympathy with every activity of the human spirit. For him, as for the great apostles of religion, nothing is to be called common or unclean. Hazlitt remarked of Shakespeare that he was "in one sense the least moral of all writers; for morality (commonly so called) is made up of antipathies, and his talent consisted in sympathy with human nature in all its shapes, degrees, depressions, and elevations."

Sir Walter Raleigh, after quoting this, adds a word of his own.[1] "This is indeed the everlasting difficulty of Shakespeare criticism, that the critics are so much more moral than Shakespeare himself, and so much less experienced. He makes his appeal to thought, and they respond to the appeal by a display of delicate taste. . . . They cannot endure to enter such and such a place. They turn away their eyes from this or that person. They do not like to remember this or that fact. Their morality is made up of condemnation and avoidance and protest. What they shun in life they shun also in the drama, and so shut their minds to nature and to Shakespeare."

We have given a fair trial, a long trial, to the system of moral training which corresponds to this system of criticism. We have not refused to enter such and such a place ourselves, but we have refused to allow others to do so: we have not turned away our eyes from this or that person, but we have looked into their books and then attempted to burn or banish

[1] *Shakespeare* ("English Men of Letters"), p. 165.

them. We have inculcated a morality made up of condemnation and avoidance and protest, without any perception of the fact that the spirit draws its well-being from what it feeds on, not from what it rejects, and falls into sickness rather by the weakness of its own power of assimilation than because of any deadliness in the food supplied by the common earth.

V

THE POETS AND THEIR FRIENDS

EVERYONE with a sensitive regard for any great interest has felt at times the irony hidden in the name of "friend": even more perhaps than others the poets have known what it is to be wounded in the house of their friends. They do not suffer much from their enemies, those colour-blind and half-disabled people who would limit the activity of the human spirit to the operations of pure reason—to using, measuring, comparing, and arguing about the material objects of perception. If the poets have to face the contempt of the ultra-scientific, they hardly wince before it. They may even be amused by the curious belief of prosaic minds that poetry is a kind of external decoration applied to ordinary speech, with the result of giving a vague and unsatisfactory account in place of a statement more precise and more in accordance with common sense. There is little sting in such opinions as these, however vehemently they may be pressed. The wounds that hurt are the unintended ones, the side blows dealt by the professed lovers of poetry, by the professed friends of the poets. We may not quarrel with these, for they are genuine friends; but it would be hard if we might not describe

them to themselves, in the hope of a better understanding.

Let us speak first of a friend whom we may call the scholar, one with whom we must all be familiar. He has received, probably, a classical education, he has been taught that Greek and Latin poetry is the almost unapproachable model of all verse; under the influences of school and university he has steadily developed his taste for the dead languages as languages and limited his taste for their poetry as poetry. In time he will, as likely as not, become a teacher himself, and will impose the same fetters upon others—for a human spirit *is* fettered when it abandons free movement and binds itself by a tradition, a prejudice, a belief in method.

It is the historical method which appeals to the scholar, and if he would use it only in its own place, I should have nothing to say against it. My argument is that for the enjoying, understanding, and estimating of poetry, which is a direct first-hand record of spiritual experience, the historical method cannot be said even to exist.

Let us consider the matter. Our scholar starts from the fact that from the earliest days of literature known to us one poet has often drawn something from the work of another; and further, that several, or perhaps many, poets will at times draw from one predecessor and resemble him and each other closely enough to be regarded as a group or school. Now this is undoubtedly a fact, and the scholar commonly holds it to be a fact of interest to the student of art. To

the student of the history of art it may be of interest; the question is whether it is of interest or of value to the student or the lover of the art itself. Those who rule the scholastic world or spend their lives in it, anxious to make everything into the subject of a lesson, seize upon this fact; and if they, and those who favour their methods, were allowed their own way, we should have poetry taught invariably as a branch of history; and the more closely scientific, the more remote from feeling the study was, no doubt the more it would deserve to rank as history. What may be of value to the student of other arts we need not presume to say, but I am sure that for the student of poetry this history of influences is very negligible. It is, in fact, a point of craftsmanship; and the past history of his craft, though perhaps not entirely useless to the poet, is certainly of no vital concern to his readers.

I do not intend to say that it is not "interesting." When I chance upon the Elegies of William Whitehead, and find them to be extraordinarily like—and unlike—the work of Gray, I am certainly amused:

> Amid these mould'ring wastes, this marble round[1]
> Where slept the heroes of the Julian name,
> Say, shall we linger still in thought profound,
> And meditate the mournful paths to fame?
>
> What though no cypress' shades, in funeral rows,
> No sculptur'd urns, the last records of fate,
> O'er the shrunk terrace wave their baleful boughs,
> Or breathe in storied emblems of the Great;

[1] "On the Mausoleum of Augustus."

Yet not with heedless eye will we survey
The same, though chang'd, nor negligently tread;
These variegated walks, however gay,
Were once the silent mansions of the dead.

In every shrub, in every flowret's bloom
That paints with different hues yon smiling plain,
Some hero's ashes issue from the tomb,
And live a vegetative life again.

Perhaps, my Villiers, for I sing to thee,
Perhaps, unknowing of the bloom it gives,
In yon fair scion of Apollo's tree
The sacred dust of young Marcellus lives.

Why do we not read more of William Whitehead? Perhaps because we are in search of poetry, and these verses of the eighteenth century, for all their reminiscence of the Country Churchyard and their anticipation of Edward Fitzgerald, are hardly poetry.

Let me take a more serious example. Here is the "Charme" used to defeat Circe's enchantment, in a mask of William Browne, of Tavistock, first acted when Milton was a boy of twelve:

Sonne of Erebus and Nighte,
Hye away; and aime thy flighte
Where consorte none other fowle
Than the batte and sullen owle.
Where upon the lymber grasse
Poppy and mandragoras,
With like simples not a few,
Hange for ever drops of dewe,
Where flowes Lethe, without coyle,
Softly, like a streame of oyle,

Hye thee thither, gentle Sleepe,
With this Greeke no longer keepe:
Thrice I charge thee by my wand,
Thrice with moly from my hand
Doe I touch Ulysses' eyes,
And with the jaspis: Then arise,
Sagest Greeke.

Wharton comments: "In praise of this song, it will be sufficient to say that it reminds us of some favourite touches in Milton's *Comus,* to which it perhaps gave birth." That is better than accusing Milton of plagiarism, but it is equally far from truth. The song is beautiful in itself, and gains our praise for its poetry, not for reminding us of a later and greater poet. Moreover, to reverse the case, when we read *Comus,* we do not remember Browne's Maske; and if our friend the scholar insists that we shall do so we regret the distraction, and are the losers by it. No doubt, if it is Milton rather than poetry that we are thinking of, it may help us to know what were the kinds of knowledge which went to his development; though even then this evidence is probably rather evidence of his taste than of any change actually worked in him by what he read. But to teach, to establish a school of teaching, on such lines is to represent literature merely as a hunting-ground for parallel passages. The classics have long been taught in this way. From the point of view of those who wish to see them regarded as literature, it is a way which is as disastrous as it is easy. But the scholar, even when he is not teaching, even when he

is writing about poetry for his own pleasure and the pleasure of his readers, too often shows a leaning towards this view of his subject. He falls easily and frequently into the way of using a biological figure of speech; he talks of poetry as if it were some strange animal; he speaks of it as "advancing rapidly to new conquests" or as "finding sustenance with difficulty in the desert of a material civilisation." "What was poetry doing now?" he asks. "Poetry was making a strenuous effort to adapt itself to the conditions of the new age." "Poetry, on the death of such and such a poet, may be said to have expired." This way of speaking is, of course, only metaphorical, but it is the outcome of a fallacious way of thinking. We are accustomed, and not without reason, to think in this biological way of society, of national life; but a nation may be compared to an organism with far more truth than poetry can be. A nation is a corporate body; it is composed of individual particles which change only by degrees. One by one they pass away, and are replaced imperceptibly by others. The result is something which does undoubtedly resemble the growth of an animal. But poetry is not a corporate body. It is, on the one hand, a spirit, animating one individual here and another there; on the other hand, in its outward manifestations, it is a collection of works produced by that spirit working in individuals. What we desire to get from it is not any kind of dealing with a corporate body; it is direct contact with the spirit of the individual, and anything which tends to

interrupt this direct contact is a positive disadvantage.

If we must adopt some metaphorical way of speaking of the effect of one poet or one generation of poets upon another, it would be more justifiable to treat them genealogically, as ancestors and descendants; or to use a purely mechanical figure, to talk of poets as a set of levers acting one upon another or as a set of cog-wheels in a large machine; for in the case of a machine there can be no danger of introducing the mistaken idea of a corporate life, while there is a certain analogy between the influence of one poet upon another, and the force received by one wheel from another and communicated by it to those which come next.

There is, however, room for a fallacy here, too. The set of influences which may be observed in English literature has not followed an orderly development; the force has not passed directly from father to son or from wheel to wheel in a true series. Chaucer influenced Spenser, Shakespeare, Keats, and William Morris, not in succession, but separately; and the influence is strongest and most direct upon the latest of them. Every man is, no doubt, to a certain extent, made by those who have gone before, in so far as he is conscious of them. But it is by no means always the case that he has been conscious of all his predecessors, or that those of whom he has been conscious have communicated to him what is spoken of as *Force*. Most often what they have given him is not the power, the compelling vision, which is the only

thing of importance, but merely the material, the old iron for his melting-pot, or the manner, which may perhaps be compared to the patina or surface colour of the metal. Lewis Morris, in his imitations of Tennyson, is a conspicuous example of both kinds of borrowing. He aims at treating a Tennysonian subject with Tennysonian finish. But what we care for, what the reader of poetry cares for, is not the subject or the superficial treatment; especially we ask not what went into the melting-pot, but what comes out of it; melted by what fires and cast into the mould of what new individuality.

Now it is certain that the last thing which should be present to the consciousness of a poet is a knowledge of what influences he is obeying, what school he belongs to. If he were, at the moment of writing, conscious of influences or of his position in a school, the first thing he should endeavor to do would be to get rid of those recollections, for they would be not a help, but a hindrance to him.[1] And whether he is conscious of them or not, such influences certainly are more often a hindrance than a help. The advice given to his younger contemporaries by a great poet still living has always been, "Do your best to get clear of the old ruts"; and one of the great disadvantages of a young poet who begins to write in an age of much education and much knowledge like the present is that he is obliged to start in these old ruts, and

[1] For example, see Wordsworth's unfortunate footnote to his "Tintern Abbey" poem. "This line has a close resemblance to an admirable line of Young's, the exact expression of which I do not recollect." He recollected too much, not too little.

may find it so long and difficult a business to escape from them. In the same way we have for years past heard painters crying out against the bondage of an academic technique. Post-impressionism is but a desperate attempt to escape from ruts.

Let us now turn to another typical friend, the antiquarian. He is even more dangerous than the scholar because his activity is, in itself, wholly good. He works in the interest of poetry, and gives help which is indispensable to the right enjoyment, or at least to the complete understanding, of it. Nevertheless, that help is often fatal in its results. He may be, and indeed often is, far from disbelief himself, especially at the beginning. Some love of poetry must be his starting-point, but he is a potent cause of disbelief in others. How many generations of schoolboys have had it painfully ground into them that to know Shakespeare is to have a sufficient acquaintance with the obsolete words he uses, the obscure events to which he alludes, the technicalities of falconry, law, or heraldry, from which he draws his metaphors? The schoolboy, perhaps, can defend himself—he has great natural powers of resistance—but among grown men the same belief persists, and is still more widely disseminated.

It is true that studies of this kind are invaluable, but they are chiefly invaluable for the removal of stumbling-blocks. Certainly thousands are shut out from the England of Chaucer only because they have not learnt the manner of speech there used. It is undeniable, too, that facts may be of some importance.

Much of the poetry of Byron and Shelley is what may be called poetry of personal experience; that is, it is directly founded, not upon a purely spiritual experience, but upon an actual experience, an event in the world of time. Even in such cases as this the poem will often, perhaps more often than not, be sufficient in itself—it will be its own sufficient interpreter. We shall be able to gather from it the general aspect of life which is moving the poet, and the particular fact may be dispensed with. I have already remarked that for the appreciation of Shelley's poem, "Away, the moor is dark beneath the moon," it is quite unnecessary for us to know the story of the quarrel with Godwin and of the subsequent elopement with Mary and Claire. But a knowledge of that story and all that it implies is necessary for the understanding of Shelley himself, of the man, the personality which this poem and all the others express.

I need not multiply examples to prove this point. They will appear sufficiently in the separate studies of poets. What I wish to be clear about now is this: it is evident that there will be, from time to time, the greatest difficulty in deciding what facts of research are important and what are unimportant in dealing with the work of any particular poet. We may say in general that in the case of a poet of any great interest there must be some biography. It will sometimes be an advantage, and sometimes a pleasure (for there are readers to whom it does give a kind of pleasure), to understand thoroughly the position of the poet at the moment of writing by tracing the

literary influences which may then have been bearing upon him, the reminiscences which formed part of the content of his mind, and also the exact nature of the stimulus which set that mind in action. What we must not do, what we must be on our guard against doing, is to imagine that either historical or antiquarian research can have anything to say to the vital essence of poetry. We must resist any influence which would tempt us to believe it possible that poetry is itself an external thing, or that it can possibly be known by its external causes. People often try to excuse, as it were, their liking for poetry by professing to base their approval of a poem on its biographical, historical, or antiquarian interest. The interest may be there, but, if so, it exists independently of the poetic quality. For example, there is a well-known passage in *Hamlet* in which Shakespeare alludes to the recent acting of plays by the company known as "The Children of the Chapel Royal":

HAMLET. What players be they?

ROSENCRANTZ. Even those you were wont to take such delight in, the tragedians of the city.

HAMLET. How chances it they travel? Their residence, both in reputation and profit, was better both ways.

ROSENCRANTZ. I think their inhibition comes by the means of the late innovation.

HAMLET. Do they hold the same estimation they did when I was in the city? Are they so followed?

ROSENCRANTZ. No, indeed they are not.

HAMLET. How comes it? Do they grow rusty?

ROSENCRANTZ. Nay, their endeavour keeps in the wonted pace, but there is, Sir, an aerie of children, little eyasses,

that cry out on the top of question, and are most tyrannically clapped for 't; these are now the fashion, and so berattle the common stages—so they call them—that many wearing rapiers are afraid of goose-quills, and scarcely dare come thither.

HAMLET. What! are they children? Who maintains 'em? How are they escoted? Will they pursue the quality no longer than they can sing? Will they not say afterwards, if they should grow themselves to common players—as it is most like, if their means are no better—their writers do them wrong, to make them exclaim against their own succession?

ROSENCRANTZ. 'Faith, there has been much to-do on both sides, and the nation holds it no sin to tarre them to controversy; there was for a while no money bid for argument, unless the poet and the player went to cuffs in the question.

HAMLET. Is 't possible?

ROSENCRANTZ. Oh, there has been much throwing about of brains.

Without the good antiquarian's help, it is quite impossible for anyone to understand what this means. But for the reception of the intuition which is the play of *Hamlet*, it is not in the least important that we should understand. The point is an extraneous one, the interest is purely topical and temporary. We lose something that the Elizabethan audience gained; but it is something that is artistically irrelevant, and therefore, in reality, no loss at all. The antiquarian knowledge, when conveyed to us, is certainly amusing, and it is easily conceivable that in the history of the stage—or, at any rate, in the history of the Elizabethan stage—it may be a point of some interest; but

in representing the play, or in reading it, the passage might with perfect safety be entirely omitted, only that it is unnecessary to do so. It enters in at the ear or the eye, but the mind passes over it precisely as it would pass over a quotation in a foreign tongue, not understood, if it occurred in the midst of a page whose meaning was otherwise perfectly clear.

A second example is this. In a recent representation of *Twelfth Night* it was observable that one part, that of the Fool, contained a good deal of jest and repartee which is entirely unintelligible to a modern audience. It is not merely that it is conceived in a taste that is not the taste of our time; it is also full of allusions, full of a play upon words which are now quite unintelligible to us; yet the general effect is not materially lessened. The power of the acting and the power which lay behind that, the power which went to the creation of this part, was amply sufficient to carry the whole, as a whole, into the mind of even a modern audience. All that was obsolete, all that had by the lapse of time lost its original fragrance, its original meaning, was passed over as easily and as lightly as if it had only been an unimportant word which the ear had missed here or there. The loss to us in this case is a real loss, because it is a loss of something originally relevant; but it is a negligible loss because enough remains to make the sense intelligible and to bring us into the same state of sympathy as the contemporary audience who caught every syllable.

These two influences—the historical and the anti-

quarian—may be described as wholly scholastic ones. "L'antiquité est le pain des professeurs." Closely akin to these, as being in origin scholastic and quite as widely spread, is the opinion of the amateur who may be called the Horatian. In a very hopeful view it might be imagined that this friend, being in truth a survival from the eighteenth century, may perhaps be not much longer with us. It is better, however, to face the unfortunate fact that he is truly national, truly representative, in his view of poetry, and that he is not unlikely to be with us as long as poetry itself.

Briefly put, his belief is that poetry consists in the versification, the terse, the neat, the witty, the felicitous versification, of what he would call sound sense—that is to say of almost undiluted prose. The holder of this creed is, of course, by nature unfriendly to any display of emotion; his belief, like his education, harks back to the Romans, and he claims their authority for his doctrine of self-repression in all things and before all things. It is he who is most frequently found complaining that new writers, writers who use either a metre or rhythm which is not familiar to him, are indulging in verse which "will not scan," which is "lawless" or "irregular," or "unmusical." It is he who believes that one of the principal functions of poetry is to provide apt quotations for use in Parliament or upon public platforms. It is he who demands most strongly that poetry, as he calls it, shall deal only with the outward aspect of life, and shall not touch upon what he is apt to describe

as "disagreeable problems." It is he, above all, who holds and fosters the belief that poets of a poetical kind are inferior beings of weak constitution and hysterical habit of mind, devoid of natural decency. His chief enthusiasm is reserved, of course, for the works of Horace. For Horace he has a profound veneration, for his works something like a passion, but he is always ready to welcome in the name of poetry anything that is, in fact, of the nature of a well-turned epigram; and for the contents of that epigram he greatly prefers his own more ordinary thoughts, or rather his own opinions, upon the moral aspects of public life or private conduct. When he turns from the Latin to our own inferior literature, it is, of course, Pope and the followers of Pope that he finds most congenial. Single lines, such as "The proper study of mankind is Man," "An honest man's the noblest work of God," or rounded couplets like this:

> For forms of Government let fools contest;
> Whate'er is best administer'd is best.

or this—

> What can ennoble sots or slaves or cowards?
> Alas! not all the blood of all the Howards.

—they drop from the Horatian's lips almost as readily as "Odi profanum" and "Justum et tenacem." And beyond these mere single pearls there are often jewels of more elaborate workmanship more solemnly exhibited:

The bliss of Man (could Pride that blessing find)
Is not to think or act beyond mankind;
No pow'rs of body or of soul to share
But what his nature and his state can bear.
Why has not Man a microscopic eye?
For this plain reason, Man is not a Fly.
Say what the use, were finer optics giv'n,
T' inspect a mite, not comprehend the heav'n?
Or touch, if tremblingly alive all o'er,
To smart and agonize at every pore?
Or, quick effluvia darting thro' the brain,
Die of a rose in aromatic pain?
If nature thunder'd in his op'ning ears,
And stunn'd him with the music of the spheres,
How would he wish that Heav'n had left him still
The whisp'ring Zephyr and the purling rill?
Who finds not Providence all good and wise,
Alike in what it gives, and what denies?

I am not, of course, contending that the Horatian is wrong in admiring Pope, or that Pope was no poet; but science, argument, instruction are not themselves poetry, however wittily and rhythmically expressed. Pope's own disclaimer is explicit. In the Introduction to the *Essay on Man,* he says:

"This I might have done in prose, but I chose verse, and even rhyme, for two reasons. The one will appear obvious: that principles, maxims, or precepts, so written, both strike the reader more strongly at first, and are more easily retained by him afterwards. The other may seem odd, but is true; I found I could express them more *shortly* this way than in prose itself; and nothing is more certain than that much

of the *force* as well as *grace* of arguments or instructions depends on their *conciseness.*"

He wrote his prose in verse, but he did not call it poetry; that is the error of his worshippers.

These views, the historical, the antiquarian, the Horatian or epigrammatic view of poetry, I have treated as deplorable, because wherever they are held and expressed they tend to obscure or displace the true view of poetry, and thereby to render poetry itself unintelligible and unpopular. I have now to speak of a view which is still commoner and more insidious: it is not the opinion of a sect, but seems to have become an established part of the prevailing confusion. Everyone knows that, although there is a very great demand for poetry in this country, the works of living poets are very seldom bought. Here and there there is a favourite, but by the ordinary practice a poet must wait for popularity until he is dead, or, at any rate, until he has been writing for a long period of years and little more can be expected of him, that is, until he is sufficiently dead to be considered as a classic. It would seem that most of us are unable to write or think even about the arts without introducing, however unconsciously, the idea of competition and of promotion by stages. We seem to hold by nature the schoolroom view of literature. It is a poet's duty to begin by taking as high a class as possible, and then to go on writing steadily and with effort until he leaves. If he maintain his effort consistently through a long career, he may hope at last to win for himself a place of honour—what is

called a niche in the Temple of Posterity. In the beginning of this process he is generally termed a "minor poet"—that is, a poet who has not yet arrived, is not even within sight of the moment of arrival. Towards the middle of his career he reaches a period at which it is extremely difficult to class him as either major or minor, and very probably he will not succeed in passing out of this indeterminate stage. If he does, if at his death there is an outbreak of public interest in his works, and if that interest is sufficiently durable, he may be considered to have passed out with credit, and he will definitely take his place among the major poets. His complete works will then be published and eagerly bought, if only to be given away; he will be among the English classics.

The explanation of all this is quite simple. At the bottom of it there lies a right reason, the recognition that the poet is more important than his poetry; that it is his personality, his personal view, and not a single performance of his of which we are in search. When a man is dead, we have his work complete; there is nothing more to wait for or collect. His personality, in so far as he was able to express it in poetry, is there before us. The facts of his life which were previously unknown to us, or very partially known, or inaccurately known, generally appear in their entirety. The revelation contained in the poetry is frequently supplemented by letters or by other documents which were not available during the man's lifetime. The effort to grasp the personality as a whole is then felt to be worth while, whereas

the act of reading a living poet forces upon us, if we think at all, the continual formulation of a hypothesis which must change from time to time, and which may prove, after all, to have been very erroneous. As with friends, so with a poet and his reader; it is quite possible for time to bring a drifting apart, a separation which may prove to be permanent. When Wordsworth's revolutionary opinions gave place to a cooler judgment, it is more than possible that he lost many of his readers for ever. When Byron was forced to leave England, it is probable that though he gained readers, he lost adherents. His case is a doubly significant one, because it reminds us that so long as a man is living, so long as he remains in the sphere of active life, it is always possible that a moral view may come in at any moment to change, or interfere with, the purely artistic view of his work. Moreover, during a man's lifetime, his social position or his social credit may have an effect upon his judgment. The greatest of our poets was only a player who went here and there and made himself a motley to the view.

There is, then, a very natural reluctance to trust to guidance while our estimate of the guide must still be imperfect and may yet be completely upset. Nevertheless, I believe that this reluctance is unfortunate in its results, and should be overcome at any cost. If it is important that we should have any dealings with poetry at all, it is surely doubly important that we should understand and value rightly the poetry which is being written by our own contemporaries: the poetry which is, in a sense, our

own, the poetry of our own generation. Of course, if a poet deliberately withholds himself from his public, if he will not speak out, if he takes the view that his inner life, even that part of it which bears upon the production of his poetry, is his own concern and no one else's, then the blame must lie partly with himself if he is misjudged. But a poet does not, as a rule, confine his poetry to the external facts of life or treat it as a thing which is concerned with externals and not with the inner man. He reveals in his poetry that which is relevant, and withholds only that which is irrelevant. The more truly poetical a man's work is, the less it depends for its interpretation upon a knowledge of anything outside itself.

Towards the end, then, of a man's career, if not earlier, we have in reality his work as a whole before us; we know him with almost the same intimacy as that which will come at the moment when he finally leaves this world. It is not, however, the completeness of our knowledge of him which promotes him to his place, which makes him a major poet. Let us be under no mistake about this. The great poets of the world were never, at any moment of their career, minor poets. Keats was not a minor poet when he wrote *Endymion;* Browning was not a minor poet when *Pauline* appeared. Probably not many among their readers would have admitted, at this time, that they had any claim to be called major poets, but, however slow the recognition, the new vision was there: the poem in each case revealed a personality of greater import than anything which it had yet

produced. Keats and Browning were unpopular, but they could not long remain obscure. It is not at this stage, but at the stage which follows, that the trouble really begins. In this country the public do not like reconsidering their judgments, nor do they like the effort which is involved in mastering anything which is complex. The result is that in all the arts a man is too often expected to limit the line of his development by his earliest successful performance. What is required of him for popularity is that he shall not disturb the first impression, that he shall continually repeat the subject and the treatment by which he made his reputation. But this is to ask something which in the nature of art is impossible. A man cannot, in any true sense, repeat an intuition once expressed. With poets, as with other men, life means change; and if we are to follow the poet, we must follow his changes. Even if the disturbing element of which I have spoken should happen to come in, even if upon a further knowledge the poet should prove to be more versatile or more revolutionary than we had hoped, we must have the courage to perform the necessary act of assimilation, we must reform our hypothesis, we must readjust our point of view. The judgment of a work of art is not a judgment by the eye or by the ear: it is the judgment of spirit by spirit, and must be performed, before all things, with sympathy.

It is, no doubt, a great demand that poetry makes in asking that every reader, however humble, however limited, should be able to adapt himself with

sympathy and understanding to the development of a personality probably far wider and more complex than his own. This may well seem to be almost impossible, but it is, perhaps, the greatest of all the advantages to be gained from poetry that the effort is necessary. The soul gains no experience if it is always to reject that of which it has hitherto known nothing, that for which it has hitherto been unable to feel either sympathy or toleration. It is not easy to overestimate the loss of Shelley's and Blake's contemporaries brought about by their inability to study those poets sympathetically. Neglect, misunderstanding, intolerance—with these a generation may injure its poets. But in so doing it will injure itself far more, trampling its own sustenance.

I pass on to another group of friends. It would be worth while to be clear as to what are minor and what are major poets if only that we might be more secure against the dangers to which we are exposed from anthologists and the growing love of anthologies. The anthology was, in its origin, a collection of minor poems, a collection of memorable pieces from the works of minor poets—that is, of poets who are not themselves so memorable. It is very much to be regretted that this definition is no longer followed; a modern anthology is simply a selection. It professes either to give you a collection of all the best poetry, excluding only those poems which are too long for inclusion in a small volume, or it sets before you a collection of all the poems of a proper length which have been written upon a given subject such as music

or mountains or the British Navy or the domestic dog. The former is, of course, the book against which my warning is directed—the general selection. The reader of it is led to understand that he has before him in this small compass all the poetry which is really worth troubling about; all that is likely to give him pleasure. He learns, therefore, either to disregard the personality of the poets altogether, to treat them all as if they were very much upon an equality when they were at their best, or at least to believe that in these select pieces he has sufficient material for judging of even the greatest poets. The Temple of Fame has been by this means rebuilt upon a conveniently small scale, the niches in it being reserved, not for poets, but for single poems.

There are, then, from the purely poetical standpoint, anthologies good, bad, and indifferent. The bad anthology is that which is chosen on a bad principle, that which sets out to be a collection of gems; the indifferent one is a mere work of reference on a special subject; the good anthology is that which is chosen on the right principle, that which professes to give the best poems of the minor poets—that is to say, the best poems of those poets who have produced from time to time good work, but have not embodied in it the whole of their personality, or have embodied in it only the personality of a simple nature and no great variety of experience or of mood. To these may well be added all those anonymous poems which cannot be attributed to any author known to us, including the contents of the Elizabethan Song-Books and

other collections, and our ancient national ballads. But this is not the kind of anthology now popular. The anthology in general request is a labour-saving appliance, and the labour which it saves the reader is the trouble of making a real acquaintance with those poets who are best worth attention. It may be true that he who knows "The Burial of Sir John Moore at Corunna" knows all that is worth knowing of the Rev. Charles Wolfe; but it is idle to suppose that an acquaintance with "The Piper," and "Tiger, Tiger," and "The Little Black Boy," can really be to the reader anything but a partial and distant view of the spiritual form of Blake. Yet this belief is not only instinctively acquired by the innocent reader, and especially by the young, but it is the commonest thing in the world to see a partial acquaintance with great authors actually advocated by those who write upon literature. We are invited to pass by as regrettable, lamentable, deplorable, or negligible, passages vitally connected with the life and thought of our greatest poets, on the ground that they describe or refer to, or involve, interests or ideas which are contrary to the accepted moral code of our own day.

The theory involved in this is plain. It is that against which I have again and again protested. Poetry is looked upon from the outside as a product, not as an expression. The poet's object is supposed to be the production of "beautiful" things; the reader's object is to collect and enjoy such things. If the "beauty" is not present in the desired degree, or if there is mingled with it any admixture of elements

which are thought undesirable for other reasons, the piece, however important, however expressive, however characteristic, is excluded from the collection. A fragment of the poet's vesture is kept; he himself is exiled.

And now that I have described these friends of the poets, the scholar or historian, the antiquarian, the Horatian, the friend who promotes the poets from minor to major, and the friend who keeps all that he cares to know of them in one pocket volume—now that I have described and deplored them, what is the upshot of my complaint? What is the justification? Is there not room for more opinions than one about poetry? We may think that our friends hold mistaken views of art, but why should we not leave them to enjoy themselves in their own way?

There are two reasons. The first I have given already: the injury to poetry. Art must fail of its highest in a community where its nature is misunderstood and its activity undervalued and confined. The opinion of individuals here and there may be unimportant; a widespread error cannot be. But I say no more of this, because it is a reason which naturally appeals only to the converted. For the unbeliever I have a more practical argument. The prevalence of a low view of art, and especially of the poetic art, has been the chief cause of our present educational distresses.

Let me trace very briefly what has been happening. At a time still within living memory, a feeling arose that the old literary education—that is, the

classical education of our public schools and universities—was no longer adequate. This was supposed to be due to a change in the demand: it was really due to a defect in the supply. Our age was thought to be a scientific age, as distinguished from the more literary, more poetic ages which preceded it. But in every age there are, and have always been, the same two activities of the human spirit, the scientific and the æsthetic, and in every age the only education which can deal adequately with life must cover them both. The great scholars of the Renaissance, with their passion for the rediscovered literature of Greece and Rome, would have been astonished to hear that the natural sciences were not their province. The advancement of learning, the discovery of Utopia, were the work of men who were blind neither of one eye nor of the other. But as time went on, the new learning fell from its high estate: it shrank from life to literature, and, further still, from literature to language. It not only lost touch with the sciences, it became an affair of mere Greek and Latin; for the brilliant man a pair of lace ruffles, for the dull one a pair of grammatical dumb-bells.

Less than fifty years ago the first attempt was made to restore, at any rate, the possibility of a wider education. Science, modern languages, and modern history were introduced into the public school curriculum. The movement was at once misunderstood and misused; it was treated as a concession to commercialism, and there followed an outcry, of which we have not yet heard the last, demanding the substitution of

technical training for education by the dead languages. The struggle continues, but it is going against the classics; Greek is in the last ditch, Latin is trembling at sight of the thin edge of the wedge. The scholars are wailing to a hostile or indifferent public that information, however true and however useful, is not education.

They are right so far, but they do not go far enough. They do not offer the real alternative—the real education, based partly upon the sciences, but mainly upon literature, rightly so called and treated. Treated, that is, not as language, not as an ingenious set of symbols, or a graceful set of traditional gestures, but as the self-expression of great natures, the record and rekindling of spiritual experiences. Between life and words the connection is at times but slight; at times it ceases to exist or passes into an antagonism. But human life and poetry can never be separated; even the most material of facts are born of the human spirit and retain their hold upon it; an iceberg, a coal mine, a burning ship, exist for us only by our perception, and may be tests of our conduct or sparks to our emotion. Since we live in two worlds, how can any education serve us which does not take account of both?

There is one other point which cannot be passed over. The new teachers must treat literature in this process of education with not less respect than science. They must not only recognise it for what it is—no mere elegance or accomplishment, but the characteristic expression of life in high moments of intuition—

they must deal with it whole and give no heed to the frivolous accusation of indecorum. In art, as in science, there is neither decorous nor indecorous—there is only relevant or irrelevant. The sea-captain is not trained upon windless and open water, nor the physician upon the records of unfailing health. If the soul is to be its own captain and physician through life, it must learn to look upon the mistakes and disasters, even upon the disgraces, of human nature. The old education was never more futile than when it expurgated both the works of the classical poets and their lives: when it classed them all together as purveyors of gems, and left their pupils to stumble by themselves upon the vice of Catullus, the morbidity of Propertius, the cynical materialism of Ovid, the brutality of Martial, and the essential banality of Horace. The real Roman poet—how little they knew him, or how little they told of him! And now that a greater poetry is available, and the life-history of more intelligible souls—is the opportunity to be lost once more? If so, the fault will lie once more not with the poets, but with their friends.

VI

CHAUCER

Part I

Chaucer was, first of all, a poet, and if mortal things still touch him at all, he must be regretting his importance to the antiquarian and to the historian of literature almost as much as the change in English which has made it difficult for posterity to read him. Every poet must live in a world of prose as well as in a world of poetry. This poet played an interesting part in a very interesting generation, helped to develop the language of his native country and brought into its poetry some of the riches of France and Italy. These were interesting achievements, but the labour and the ingenuity necessary for investigating them have made them seem more important than they really are. The study of them has come to be regarded as the true method of approaching the poet. It is necessary to face this fact at once because, in Chaucer's case if anywhere, such a theory might be supposed to find its justification. Both the antiquarians and the historians of literature have been engaged upon work which is, in itself, fascinating and which has been carried out with minute and indefatigable

research. Let us very briefly summarise this research and then observe how much or how little of it is necessary or helpful to our enjoyment of Geoffrey Chaucer's poetry.

The antiquarians have undeniably done much; they have outlined and partially, at least, filled in the career of a middle-class gentleman of the fourteenth century, who had to make his living and at the same time to satisfy his literary inclination. In doing this they bring us into contact with persons and events worthy of a place in historical romance, and they work by a series of ingenious inferences which gratify our detective instinct. The family of Chaucer, they tell us, came from Ipswich in Suffolk. Robert Chaucer, Collector of Customs, had a son John, a vintner, a Deputy-Collector in Southampton with a house in Thames Street, London. John went with Edward III. upon his expedition to Flanders in 1338 and he died in 1358. His son Geoffrey was probably born in 1340. The evidence for this conjecture is interesting. In 1386, in the celebrated heraldic case between Scrope and Grosvenor, Chaucer was one of the witnesses, and his age is vaguely entered as being forty years and upwards, but he is also stated, and this must have been from his own evidence, to have borne arms for twenty-seven years, and in fact twenty-seven years before, in 1359, he is recorded to have taken part in Edward's invasion of France, to have been captured by the enemy and to have been ransomed by the king for the sum of sixteen pounds sterling. He can hardly have been less than eighteen or nineteen years old

at this time, especially as he had then, for at least two years, been a page in the household of Lionel, Duke of Clarence. In 1361, when Clarence went to Ireland, Chaucer was taken into the king's own service as valet and afterwards as esquire of the body.

The next important event in his life was probably his marriage, which has been the subject of another long and intricate discussion. The outline of the case is as follows. In a record of 1374 Chaucer's wife is mentioned by the name of Philippa. Now in a list of the queen's ladies in 1366 is one named Philippa Chaucer. Thirdly, there was living at this time a married lady named Chaucer, whose maiden name had been Roet, daughter of a foreign knight, Sir Payne Roet, and sister to Katherine Roet who married Sir Otho Swinford, and subsequently became, first the mistress, and afterwards the wife, of John of Gaunt. This lady's son was named Thomas Chaucer; he was afterwards chief butler to Richard II. and Henry IV. and was more than once Speaker of the House of Commons. Upon his seal he used the arms of Chaucer, upon his tomb at Ewelme were placed those of Roet. In view of the fact that the poet was, throughout the latter part of his life at any rate, closely attached to the fortunes of John of Gaunt, and that he was treated with great consideration by Henry IV., it seems natural to suppose that Thomas Chaucer was Geoffrey's son. The statement is definitely made by Thomas Gascoine, who was Chancellor of Oxford—Ewelme is within sixteen miles of Oxford—and died in 1458. He must have known many people who were

personally acquainted with both Geoffrey and Thomas Chaucer. He is a thoroughly competent witness, and there is nothing whatever to disprove his evidence. It is strongly supported by the recent discovery that Thomas was certainly Geoffrey's next-of-kin, for he succeeded him in the lease of his house at Westminster. He was also appointed to succeed him in the place of Forester of North Petherton in Somerset. The question is a first-rate incentive to record hunting: it can no longer be said to be one of serious doubt, but it continues to give pain to those who can accept any theory more easily than that which they wish to believe.

The alternative theory would necessarily be that there were two Chaucers living simultaneously at this time both intimately connected with the Court, the humbler one, Geoffrey the Poet, related to nobody in particular, the far more important one brother-in-law to John of Gaunt, father of the Speaker of the House of Commons, grandfather of the Duchess of Suffolk, but totally unknown to history, never even named or referred to by the records which give us so many pieces of information about the poor poet. This second gentleman is a noble quarry to hunt, but if ever he is run to earth it will probably be in Westminster Abbey.

In the meantime Geoffrey's rise is visible enough. In 1369 he was again in France with the army; in 1372 he went to Italy in company with two Genoese merchants on a diplomatic mission. In 1373, unless the remark which he puts into the mouth of the Clerk

of Oxford in the *Canterbury Tales* is entirely pointless, he met "Francys Petrarke the laureat poet" at Padua. After his return home he was rewarded with the post of Comptroller of Customs, and took a house in Aldgate. In 1377 he is named by Froissart as one of the three English envoys sent to Calais to treat for peace between the two countries.

In the following year, after the death of Edward III., he was again in France as an envoy to treat of the marriage of Richard II. with one of the daughters of Charles V. In 1378 he went again to Italy with Sir Edward Berkeley. The year following his return is marked by two rather shadowy affairs. The first is this. An action was brought against Chaucer by a lady named Cecelia Chaumpaigne "*de raptu meo.*" The matter was settled in 1380, when the lady, no doubt in consideration of a money payment, gives Chaucer a discharge from all legal proceedings whether on account of her carrying off or from any other causes from the beginning of the world until this present moment. The field remains open for the literary detective. At present there are two points only to be noted. One which certainly seems to offer something like a clue worth following is that the Suffolk Champaignes would appear to have been related to the Chaucers; Cecilia, therefore, may have been Geoffrey's cousin, and the case may have been either a love-affair or a question of wardship, though the lady was apparently of full age. The second point may be a clue or it may be merely a coincidence. It is that in this year, 1380, was born Lowis, the little

son to whom Chaucer, eleven years later, dedicated his "Treatise on the Astrolabe." It has been generally supposed, perhaps with sufficient reason, that Lowis was not Chaucer's legitimate son; and to show that speculation of this kind involves no unfair estimate of Chaucer's moral character, we are reminded that the "Compleynt of Mars" was written exactly at this juncture. The event of the day referred to in this poem was an affair between the notorious John Holland, Earl of Huntingdon, and the Duchess of York. The scandal was great, for the lady was not only the wife of Gaunt's brother, but also the sister of Gaunt's wife: yet Gaunt stood by her in the business and shortly afterwards received Huntingdon as his own son-in-law. Finally, the "Compleynt of Mars," written to his order, praises and glorifies all the persons concerned, and endows them with all the perfections of the heroes and heroines of the romances of chivalry.

In 1382 Chaucer was granted the right to appoint a deputy at the Custom House. In 1386 he was elected and sat as Knight of the Shire for Kent, but at the end of that year disaster fell upon him. His friends, so to speak, went out of office. John of Gaunt went to Spain to claim the throne of Castile in right of his wife. His brother Gloucester came into power, impeached the Chancellor, and appointed a Commission. Apparently one of their earliest reforms was to change the Comptroller of the Customs. This may possibly have been just; Chaucer had been writing poetry, and his deputy may either have been inef-

ficient or dishonest, but when King Richard came of age three years later and dismissed Gloucester, he consoled Chaucer with the appointment of Clerk of the Works at the Royal Residences, again with the right to appoint a deputy. This apointment was also lost two years afterwards, but Chaucer was again compensated by the gift of a pension of twenty pounds a year from the king. It is certain, however, that he was not at this time in very easy circumstances, for he had difficulties in obtaining either his pension or an advance upon it. His fortunes mended when Richard was deposed. John of Gaunt had, for some time, made him a small allowance: Henry IV., only four days after his accession, replaced this with a second Royal Pension of twenty-six pounds a year, but Chaucer died almost immediately afterwards. He was buried in Westminster Abbey, where, one hundred and fifty years afterwards, the well-known monument was erected to his memory by an admirer.

Such, in outline, are the materials for a biography of this poet, and when we come to deal with the poems themselves it will be seen at once, that while these facts enable us to understand a few allusions to Chaucer's works, they contribute almost nothing to the understanding or appreciation of his poetry as poetry. They are not illuminating but merely informing, hardly even that, for they have added little to what the poems themselves tell us.

But there is another series of facts concerning Chaucer of which this is not altogether true. The

literary history, and even the linguistic history, of his poems are of great interest, though here too there is commonly a good deal of misunderstanding. Chaucer's poems, we are told, are written in what was then the dialect of the South-Eastern Midlands, the speech from which is directly derived the educated English of the present day. When we have to decide, as we do sometimes have to decide, whether or not to accept certain lines as the work of Chaucer, a knowledge of this dialect may be useful for the purpose of comparison; but for the reading of the poems it is entirely unimportant. Chaucer's language must be studied till it can be read with ease, and there our concern with it ends. We are, however, assured, and this, if true, is our concern, that Chaucer deliberately selected, or rather that he deliberately set to work to create, his medium of expression.

This theory has been stated as follows: The "courteous poets" of the society in which Chaucer lived were still writing in French or rather in Anglo-Norman. On the other hand, the popular poets were employing the English language, but only for utilitarian purposes, without regard to its suitability or beauty. Chaucer adopted the language they used because it was the only living one, the only one which could reach all classes of the community; but he resolved at the same time to endow it with all the delicacy and refinement that he had perceived in the French language and especially in the poetry of France. To this we must add that after translating part at any rate of the *Romaunt de la Rose* of Guillaume de

Lorris, and adopting from Guillaume de Machault the famous form of stanza known as the Rhyme Royal, he went on to borrow from Italian authors, from Petrarch, from Boccacio, and from Dante, besides using a good deal of material which he acquired from the Latin, from Cicero, from Ovid, from Statius. and from Boethius.

Now there can be no doubt about the significance of these transactions; if some of them were unconscious obligations, others were undoubtedly borrowings, imitations, and even translations. On the whole they point, not so much to receptivity, as to deliberate acquisitiveness. Chaucer's case is not simply the case of a man who has read much and been much influenced by his reading. A poet often owes much to his predecessors, sometimes a way of looking at certain things, more often a metrical form or a piece of material which will, hereafter, when assimilated, form part of his own intuition. Such gifts, such causes must be taken into account for what they are worth. At the highest, they are part, not of the poet himself, but of his education; at the lowest they are as unimportant as the beef which went to make his bones. When Chaucer tells us of Palamon and Arcite or of January and May it is no advantage to us to know that the one story came originally from Statius, the other from Boccaccio. It is not a fact of poetic interest; it distracts from sympathy, it is information breaking in upon emotion; even when we hear Chaucer saying, and saying more than once, in his own poems, "Lo, Pitie renneth soon in gentle heart," we

gain nothing by the knowledge that Dante had already spoken of "Amor che al cor gentil ratto s'apprende." In the "Merchant's Tale" the line is Chaucer's and not Dante's, the borrowing is naught. But there are facts about Chaucer's indebtedness which bear a very different meaning. They help us to understand what may be called his poetical career, the adventure of his soul in the world of poetry. They show, I think, that he began with an ambition which was by no means of the highest, for it involved a theory of poetry, or a feeling about poetry, which was, in part at least, radically mistaken. It was not until he had forgotten this theory or outgrown this feeling that he became a great poet and far out-soared his early ambition. Even then, even in his years of masterful creation, he seems not to have realised how completely he had left behind such melodies as those of "Granson, Flower of them that make in France."

In this respect Chaucer was typical, and his example is for our instruction. Many of those who are moved to write in verse, perhaps the greater number of them, begin in the way in which Chaucer began, though they are, unfortunately, seldom fated to end where he ended. But to them, as to him, the first impulse which comes is the desire to make something beautiful in verse, to copy the pattern or reproduce the cadences of the poets whom they have read and loved; to emulate their success and possibly their fame.

There is nothing discreditable in this; it is natural that a young writer who has as yet had no spiritual

experiences of his own at first hand, should draw upon his favourite books, both for his intuitions and for the expression of them. The process entails perpetual effort and comparison, it is part of his education and may be a valuable one. If, when the time of his experience comes, he has acquired the strength to throw aside, or to use naturally, the garb and the gestures which he has learnt from others, to look upon the world with his own eyes and to speak of it with his own voice, then he is a poet, with the additional advantage that he is the legitimate descendant of a long line of poets. But this is the achievement of one only in many thousands. Every generation, and particularly our own, produces a swarm of verse-writers who begin and end with copying the patterns or playing variations on the tunes of others. Their metrical skill is often great, but the fact only serves to remind us that poetry is not an affair of metrical skill but a kind of perception, a personal manner of recreating the world.

Chaucer's singular example shows us that a man may be a great poet but yet not realise this. He may even live to write the *Canterbury Tales* and still be troubled about details of technique, still hanker after his French models, and lament the inferiority of his own language in rhyme, still think of himself as an artificer after he has, in fact, become an artist.

Let us now trace the outline of Chaucer's poetical career, so far as it is known to us by his surviving works. It begins with the "Book of the Duchess," a poem written to commemorate the death of Blanche

of Lancaster, John of Gaunt's first wife. "Whyte," she was called, he says, and with good reason.

> That was my lady namë right,
> She was bothë fair and bright
> She haddë not her namë wrong.

The description of her character is charming, and so is the hunting scene, where the poet, in a dream, first comes upon her disconsolate husband.

> A man in blak,
> That sat and had y-turned his bak
> To an Oke, an hugë tree.

But the machinery by which the dream is introduced is rather long-winded and clumsy. The date of the piece is practically fixed by the fact that the Duchess died in 1369 and that the Duke married again two years later. After this followed the translation of a part, at any rate, of the *Romaunt de la Rose,* and the writing of the four poems called the "Compleynte unto Pitë," a collection of pieces of no great interest. Here ends what has been called Chaucer's first or French Period. In 1372-3 came his journey to Italy, and upon his return to the house in Aldgate the Italian Period begins. During the next few years were written the first part of the *House of Fame* and the whole of *Troilus and Criseyde.* In 1379 or 1380 comes the "Compleynte of Mars," a courtier's poem, which, in the most barefaced way, exhibits Mars as a mortal knight ready to die in his lady's service.

Chaucer's next poem, the "Parlement of Foules," is also a courtier's poem, an allegory written on the

marriage of Richard II. with Anne of Bohemia, in 1382. It contains some dull allegorical figures, a catalogue of birds, a catalogue of trees, some humorous dialogues, and a roundel, of which the poet says, "The note I trowë makèd was in France," and it is hardly less feeble than its French pattern. Between 1381 and 1385 is supposed to have been written the unfinished poem called "Anelida and Arcite," though the reasoning is not conclusive. In the *Legend of Good Women,"* written in 1385, Chaucer enumerates among the poems which he had already written, "all the love of Palamon and Arcite," though "Anelida and Arcite" is by no means all the love of Palamon and Arcite, it is a mere beginning of a poem and does not mention Palamon at all. It is noticeable, too, that it is written partly in rhyme royal and partly in a nine-line stanza, whereas the complete story as we have it in the *Canterbury Tales* is in rhymed couplets. It seems, therefore, more probable that when Chaucer mentioned it in 1385 he had already recast the poem in a different metre and completed it; and this view is supported by the fact that the complete poem, as we know it, was not originally intended for the *Canterbury Tales* at all, for the descriptions of the court of Duke Theseus are not such as could be put into the mouth of a knight of the fourteenth century, but are only possible for a poet who has the run of all the ages. Moreover, the narrator makes it plain again and again that he is not telling but writing the story. He says, for instance—

> Of this sad tale I will no more indite.

and again—

> But of that story list me not to write.

and the lines—

> I trow men woldë deme it negligence
> If I foryete to tellen the dispence

are clearly written in the study and not spoken to his fellow pilgrims.

The *Legend of Good Women* itself Chaucer wrote, according to the poet Lydgate, at the request of the queen, that he might make amends to her and to the God of Love for all the evil that he had spoken of women. It remained unfinished, either because Chaucer felt that it was becoming monotonous, or because, in 1386, John of Gaunt left the country and the poet lost his livelihood for a time. 1387 is the year in which the pilgrims are supposed to start for Canterbury, and part, at any rate, of the poem is shown to have been composed not later than 1388 by the mention of Middleburg in Holland as the seat of the wool-staple.

In 1389, when Richard took the reins of government into his own hands, Chaucer addressed to him the "Ballade of Lak of Stedfastnesse," which may have been intended as an encouragement to good government but reads very much like a criticism of the king.

In 1393 he writes a very amusing poem to his friend Scogan containing a humorous description of himself, as Olde Grisel, "hore and rounde of shape."

Finally there is the "Ballade de Bon Conseil" called "Trouthe," which is traditionally said to have been written in the last year of his life. The few remaining poems cannot be dated.

The first thing which calls for notice in this list is, that although several of the poems in it are evidently connected with definite events, these are not really public events but merely events in the private life of the poet or of his patrons. If we may judge from his poetry, public events, national events, touched Chaucer as little as his business at the Custom House or at the office of Clerk of the Works. He lived in stirring times but he made little or no reference to them. He mentions neither Edward III. nor the Black Prince, though both of them died some time after he had begun writing. He never refers to the French wars; even his famous knight he represents as having fought in Prussia and in Barbary, but not, as one might have expected, at Poitiers or even at Crecy. He does indeed speak of the conquest of Albion by his patron, Henry IV., but it is only when he wishes to solicit his favour in a merely complimentary piece of verse. The two greatest poems, *Troilus and Criseyde* and the *Canterbury Tales* are entirely free from any such dependence on the everyday world. The only reason for their existence is a purely artistic one. They need no research to throw light upon them: on the contrary it is they that throw light on the past. And I think we may say this of all Chaucer's poems, whatever their origin: they are themselves historical documents, evidences of feeling

and cultivation. All these facts and events of mediæval England—those royal deaths, marriages, infidelities, politics, pensions—the poems help to explain these. They are not explained by them any more than the beacon is explained by the match that fired it. However intimately Chaucer mixed in the world of prose, he was not at home there: his soul dwelt apart, as Milton's did in youth, though never afterwards. But Chaucer's soul was not like a star: it was like the autumnal sun, distant and mellow, looking upon all, irradiating all, with impartial geniality.

The antiquarian study of Chaucer is, therefore, of very little importance except for the purposes of the examination-room. The position of the historians of literature is a somewhat stronger one. In the two poems last mentioned, Chaucer stands out as our first great national poet, the first great poet of the English nation as we know it, and from his own day to the day of William Morris his work has no doubt exercised a great influence upon English poetry. But the claim so often made for him, that he actually invented an English language and an English poetry, is certainly exaggerated, and has been too hastily put forward. No one has yet made a sufficiently careful examination of the English poetry written during the fourteenth century, and independent of Chaucer, to be able to tell us with any authority exactly what it was that Chaucer did and how he differed from his predecessors or his contemporaries. Before him there are no great names, but there are lyrics decidedly better than his own as poetry, and by no means inferior

to his own as verse. On the other hand, no one else then living possessed the mastery of a metre that could be used for a poem of any length; there was nothing which could oust the rough and monotonous alliterative measure of Piers Plowman until Chaucer introduced the rhyme royal and the heroic couplet. He certainly learnt from the French and Italian to use these two metres, just as he also learnt from them how to make his native language a richer and more flexible medium of expression. For these improvements he would probably have claimed credit and no one could well refuse it to him; but for lovers of poetry the really interesting thing is not where he got his language and his metres, but what he did with them, and to show us this we need nothing but the poems themselves.

Part II

Setting aside all matters of historical or antiquarian interest, what is the real pleasure of reading Chaucer —the simple, direct pleasure which he gives to those who come to make his acquaintance without much learning, but with a love of poetry and sufficient goodwill to carry them through the obstacles of antiquated spelling and dialect? It may be compared, I think, to the pleasure of travel, the pleasure not of escaping from our own life but of changing it for a time, of leaving behind its complications, its narrowness and unrefreshed familiarity, of going away with the poet into a world which is partly new, and partly in accord

with our own experiences and our own desires. This world of Chaucer's, what is it like, of what materials has he made it, and in what relation to it does he stand himself?

Let us leave behind, as he at last left behind, the unnatural twilight region of fantasy, of conventional "swevenes" and allegories; let us spend our time with the author of *Troilus and Criseyde* and of the *Canterbury Tales*. Here is poetry made from the best of raw materials—of "clay ta'en from the common earth." The beings who inhabit this world are men and women. They are not mere imaginings, monstrous or angelic. The Canterbury Pilgrims, since the day when they first rode from the Tabard, have never ceased to live with a full and intelligible life. There are among them some so modern that this seems natural enough. The old Knight is an example of the chivalrous character which is born again in every generation of Englishmen. The Squire is just the clean-run young man of any day, half dandy, half athlete, wholly amorous, but none the less a steady, serviceable fellow. The Merchaunt has all the massive dignity that comes only from finance. The Sergeant of the Lawe is for ever piling up fees and buying land. We recognise his very manner:

> No-where so bisy a man as he ther nas,
> And yet he seemed bisier than he was.

The doctor's pharmacopœia may be out of date, but he uses it in the way we know:

> Full redy hadde he his apothecaries,
> To send him droggës and his letuaries,
> For ech of them made other for to winne,
> Hir frendschipe nas nat newë to beginne.

He is a man of science from the first:

> His studie was but litel on the bible.

The "poure Parson of a towne," the man of true religion, is with us still, no doubt, though he is little heard of in any age. Perhaps the most recent portrait of him was painted by Anthony Trollope in the *Last Chronicle of Barsetshire.*

Other characters there are whom at first sight we do not recognise: the Prioress, the Monk, the Friar, the Franklin, the Reeve, the Somnour, the Pardoner, the Wife of Bath. But not one of these is in reality extinct. They have changed their name and occupation, but they are all here still, for the principal part of each of them is a definite element of humanity. Chaucer in his notes has not merely described the superficial markings of a number of species which have long since perished, he has recorded permanent and recognisable types. This becomes doubly clear as soon as he sets his characters in action. When we accompany the Pilgrims on their way, when we hear them now entertaining and now angering each other, personally conducted in the fullest sense by their masterful and versatile host, we have no feeling of being among aliens. We are most of us, perhaps, more truly at home in their company than Chaucer himself

was, for we are not troubled by his sense of isolation, that loneliness of the literary man among a throng of interests and forces which take so small account of him.

This truth to nature, as it is called, this power of exhibiting the universal in the particular is attested in a very curious way. To an Englishman, Chaucer must always appear to be the most English of poets; for his diction, his metres, and his materials he may have drawn upon France and Italy, but the characters he creates and the standpoint from which he regards them are essentially our own. So we feel: but our claim is not undisputed. The latest French critic of Chaucer assures us that he was entirely and fundamentally French, French in diction, French in temperament, French even by descent. To those who dwell among the mediæval Italians, he is, at least by adoption, a son of Italy. Even to Germans, we are told, there is a strangely familiar sound in his voice: to use one of his own words, he is no "fremde." These counter-claims cannot be altogether set aside. English as Chaucer undoubtedly is, it must be allowed that when he speaks to the inner man he speaks in the tongue whereto we were all born. For those at any rate who belong to the civilisation of Western Europe, the life which Chaucer has created breathes many familiar odours ancient and modern, some of the rankest, some of the most fragrant. One happy result of this universality is that the artist has an unexpectedly homogeneous medium to work in: time and space introduce into it no troublesome distinctions. Whether

the scene is laid in Troy, in Italy, in Flanders, or in England the poet has always the same freedom, the same possibility of using his gifts. His delicate observation, his shrewdness, his tenderness for his own personages, are never out of place: they never need supplementing by research or local colour, those two solid make-weights which the modern story-teller has unfortunately been compelled by conscious to throw into the scale of dreams. One can imagine what an Ebers, a Sienkiewics, or even a Flaubert would have made of the story of Troilus and Criseyde. The reader would have risen from the book with the flattering impression that he was now familiar with the history and even with the manners and personalities of ancient Troy. Soon, no doubt, some Gilbert Murray would have destroyed this illusion, and some Andrew Lang perhaps would then have dashed in to reassure him. What Chaucer has done with the story is something quite different. He has placed it for ever beyond the reach of learning or controversy by setting it in a world of pure art, a world of which he is master, as no historian can ever be master of the world of place and time.

There was a church festival,

> And to the temple, in al hir bestë wyse,
> In general, there wentë many a wight,
> To herknen of Palladion the servyse;
> And namëly, so many a lusty knight,
> So many a lady fresh and mayden bright,
> Ful wel arayèd, bothë moste and leste,
> Ye, bothë for the seson and the feste.

Was this in England or in Troy? Was it yesterday or five hundred years ago, or a thousand years before that? What matter!

> Among thise othere folk was Criseyda,
> In widewes habite blak:

and Troilus saw her.

> And sodeynly he wex ther-with astonèd,
> And gan hir bet biholde in thrifty wyse:
> "O mercy God!" thoughte he, "wher hastow wonèd,
> Thou art so fair and goodly to devyse?"
> Ther-with his hertë gan to sprede and ryse,
> And softë sighèd, lest men mighte him here,
> And caught a-yein his firstë pleyinge chere.
> * * * * * * *
> To Troilus right wonder wel with-alle
> Gan for to lyke hir mening and hir chere,
> Which somdel deynous was, for she leet falle
> Hir look a lite a-side, in swich manere,
> Ascaunces, "What! may I not stonden here?"
> And after that hir loking gan she lighte,
> That never thoughte him seen so good a sighte.
>
> And of hir look in him ther gan to quiken
> So greet desir, and swich affeccioun,
> That in his hertës botme gan to stiken
> Of hir his fixe and depe impressioun:
> And though he erst hadde pourèd up and doun,
> He was tho glad his hornës in to shrinke;
> Unnethes wiste he how to loke or winke.

In short he had found out at last

> that Love hadde his dwellinge
> With-inne the subtile stremës of hir yen.

It is in that same country that Pandarus, on a later day, begins his business of go-between with a morning call upon the lady, almost every detail of which could be related with perfect ease in the language of *Pride and Prejudice.* This is followed by the business of the dinner-party, which Deiphebus (Troilus's brother) is induced to give, with the ostensible object of getting his relations to take an interest in the poor little widow's lawsuit, but in reality to provide an opportunity for throwing the young people at each other's heads. The party was just a plain family party, but dignified by the presence of Queen Eleyne herself. It was as Deiphebus's sister that

> Hoomly, sooth to seyne,
> She com to diner in hir playn intente,
> But God and Pandare wiste al what this mente.

Equally natural, and equally undateable, is the visit to Troilus in his sick-room, the introduction of Criseyde always on business, and the timely departure of the two others to read an important letter in the garden. The scene ends with their return.

Pandarus gives the alarm:

> But lo! no more as now of this matere,
> Forwhy this folk wol comen up anoon,
> That have the lettre red: lo, I them here . . .
> With that Eleyne, and also Deiphebus
> Tho comen upward, right at the steyrës end.

As with this poem so with the best of the *Canterbury Tales.* They live with a consistent and essentially

human life. They are modern to-day, as they have been modern in every century since they were first created. They belong to the Chaucerian Age, which is poetically contemporary with our own.

A second quality which distinguishes the life of Chaucer's world is its happiness. There is pain in it and there is perplexity, but there is neither agony nor rebellion. Fortune is fickle, but that is just a rule of the game: it is a good world. Love, of course, is a great risk.

> For love is yet the mostë stormy life
> Right of himself, that ever was bigonne:
> For ever some mistrust or nycë stryf
> There is in love, som cloud is over the sonne:
> There-to we wrecched women nothing conne,
> Whan us is wo, but wepe and sit and thinke;
> Our wrecche is this, our owenë wo to drinke.

This is the lady's plight, and here is her lover's:

> Gret was the sorwe and pleynt of Troilus:
> But forth hir cours Fortune ay gan to holde.
> Criseyde loved the sone of Tydens
> And troilus mot wepe in carës colde.
> Swich is this world; whoso it can biholde,
> In ech estat is litel hertës reste:
> God leve us for to take it for the beste!

Such reflections as these do not imperil optimism: on the contrary, they heighten happiness by making it more conscious. Whether conscious or not, Chaucer is fundamentally happy. Life is to him a field of delights. Of course this is not everything—we can-

not rest there, we shall ask whether he has the poet's double gift of vision—vision of earth, and vision of heart's desire. The first of these he has abundantly and it is in reality the rarer: the spirit, which alone perceives, has naturally more difficulty in expressing that which must be perceived by it through the veils of sense. It is impossible to go far in reading Chaucer without realising that his power of physical perception is extraordinarily fresh and keen. This does not come, as has been sometimes said, from living in the fresher atmosphere of an early age. The fourteenth century was not an early age in this sense: it was the end of a civilisation and the beginning of a decadence, an hour of evening and not of dawn. But the dew of the morning is upon Chaucer's eyes, as upon the eyes of Milton and of Keats.

> But right as flourës, thorugh the colde of nighte
> Y-closëd, stoupen on hir stalkës lowe,
> Redressen hem a-yein the sonnë bright,
> And spreden on their kindë cours by rowe;
> Right so. . . .

Yes, right so all the old beauties of the world come fresh and springing to the vision of this spirit. Even the moon and the nightingale keep their loveliness unspoiled and strange.

> A nightingale, upon a cedar grene,
> Under the chambre-wal ther as she lay,
> Ful loudë sang again the monë shene,
> Paraunter, in his briddes wyse, a lay
> Of love, that made hir hertë fresh and gay.

That herkned she so longe in good entente
Til at the laste the dedë sleep hir hente.

The cedar, no doubt, was brought to the Chaucerian garden from Italy and through France, but the bird is the bird we know in England.

And as the newe abaysshèd nightingale
That stinteth first when she beginneth singe,
When that she hereth any herdë tale
Or in the hegges any wight steringe,
And after, siker dooth hir voys out-ringe;
Right so Criseydë, when hir dredë stente,
Opened hir herte, and told him hir entente.

The simile is striking, because it is new; and convincing, because it is familiar. The common things of life are full of these possibilities for Chaucer.

Of the second gift we must give a different account. Chaucer's vision of Heart's Desire is, at first sight, only a fragmentary one, a confusion of broken lights. If he has not suffered the full crash of the storm, the total darkening of the sun, neither has he acquired the power to see the blue dome round and cloudless, or the heaven above heaven of the night. His consolations are not satisfying; they are too intellectual and too opportunist; too evidently borrowed, and from inconsistent sources. The most complete example is the passage which immediately follows the death of Troilus.

And whan that he was slayn in this manere
His lightë goost ful blisfully is went

Up to the holownesse of the seventh spere,
In convers letinge every element;
And ther he saugh, with ful avysëment,
The erratic sterrës, herkeninge armonye
With sownës fulle of hevenish melodye.

And doun from thennës faste he gan avyse
This litel spot of erthe, that with the see
Embracèd is, and fully gan despyse
This wrecched world, and held al vanitee
To respect of the playn felicitie
That is in hevene above; and at the laste
Ther he was slayn, his lokinge doun he caste:

And in himself he lough right at the wo
Of them that wepten for his deeth so faste;
And dampnèd al our werk that folweth so
The blindë lust, the which that may not laste,
And shoulden al our herte on hevene caste.
And forthe he wentë, shortly for to telle,
Ther as Mercurie sorted him to dwelle.
* * * * * *

O youngë fresschë folkës, he or she,
In which that love upgroweth with your age,
Repeyreth hoom from worldly vanitee,
And of your herte up-casteth the visage
To thilkë God that after his image
Yow made, and thinketh al nis but a fayre—
This world, that passeth sone as flowrës fayre.

There can, I think, be no difference of opinion about the poetical quality of this passage. It is beautiful, touching, even consoling. It lays the reader completely under the spell of the poet's mood. But I

cannot help seeing also that for those who look twice at it, whether from the artistic or the intellectual point of view, it must be in many ways unsatisfactory. Art knows but one tense; beauty is either present or non-existent. But in Chaucer's thought a wide sea lies between the shore of this life and that of the Happy Isles. For him the perfect state must be a future state. His Paradise is the Heaven of a creed, and that a creed not wholly grasped or wholeheartedly believed. The question of the possible co-existence of Time and Eternity has never even occurred to him. The miseries and instability of mortal life are to be escaped, by following the precepts of revealed religion. But he has unfortunately failed to perceive that this method, as he understands it, involves the total abandonment of all the happiness and all the beauty—even the moral beauty—of that very world whose imperfection he is endeavouring to remedy. If ever man loved worthily, he tells us, it was Troilus; yet his love failed him. Till the moment of disaster, love was all life and the meaning of it; but when the failure came that meaning was instantly untrue. Love's surrender, love's service, love's union, love's faithfulness all disappear as things of nought. They have in a moment become "feyned loves" and "thise wrecched worldës appetytes." Man's sorrow comes from loving the creature instead of the Creator: and this, in some odd way, is the fault of the heathen deities.

> Lo here, of Pagens corsëd oldë rytes,
> Lo here, what al hir goddës may availle;

> Lo here, thise wrecched worldës appetytes:
> Lo here the fyn and guerdon for travaille
> Of Jove, Apollo, of Mars, of swich rascaille!

This philosophy is the less satisfactory, because it is not consistently put forward on all similar occasions. In the "Knight's Tale," when the lover must die and leave his lady to his rival, an exquisitely pathetic scene ends with the avowal of a resignation which is almost agnostic.

> Only the intellect, withouten more,
> That dwelled in his hertë syk and sore,
> Gan faillen, when the hertë feltë deeth,
> Duskèd his eyen two, and faillèd breeth.
> But on his lady yet caste he his eye;
> His lastë word was "Mercy, Emelye."
> His spirit chaungèd hous and wentë ther,
> As I cam never, I can nat tellen wher.
> Therefore I stinte, I nam no divinistre;
> Of soulës finde I nat in this registre,
> Ne me ne list thilke opiniouns to telle
> Of hem, though that they wryten wher they dwelle.
> Arcite is cold, ther Mars his soulë gye;
> Now wol I speken forth of Emelye.

and the whole matter is concluded with a stoical exhortation.

> Ther helpeth noght, al goth that ilkë weye,
> Thanne may I seyn that al this thing moot dye.
> What maketh this but Jupiter the King,
> The which is prince and cause of allë thing?—
> * * * * * * *

Thanne is it wisdom as it thinketh me,
To maken virtue of necessitee,
And take it wel, that we may not eschue,
And namëly, that to us alle is due.
And whoso gruccheth ought, he dooth folye,
And rebel is to him that al may gye.

So much for Chaucer's statement of his belief, or beliefs, about human life and happiness. But in this matter his feeling goes far deeper than his intellect. He is really neither a pagan philosopher nor a theological ascetic. He sees the life of the soul only in fitful and uncertain gleams, but they are gleams of a true inward light, of that indeed which is the master-light of all our seeing. His religion, which is not the same thing as his confused acceptance of dogma, and his philosophy, which is not the same thing as his chaotic fatalism, cannot perhaps be more precisely stated in words. But they are felt, they are his own, and they cover the whole of life. They are both founded in a deep loving-kindness, an all-including sympathy, which does not forbid the most penetrating analysis but ensures that it shall never be unmerciful. The atmosphere of his world is brilliantly clear, but it is soft at the same time. It has none of that hard glare in which the myriad colours and delicate shades of life go out and leave only an unnatural contrast of black and white. Its sunlight is genial and impartial, its darkness full of pity.

What is this world? What asketh men to have?
Now with his love, now in his coldë grave
Allone, withouten any companye.

Sunt lacrimae rerum. What we look for in a poet is first that he should perceive the delight of earth: then that he should recognise that there are tears in human life. Beyond this there is a further gift, which is not Chaucer's: but what he gives is much. By that which he loves and weeps for we know, not how, but in what spirit, he would remould the sorry scheme of things.

To those who accept what I have said, it will not be surprising to find that Chaucer, though he has made a world of his own, does not inhabit it himself. Poetry is for him an external thing: the poet is a craftsman like any other, only as his craft is the most worthy of all, he is a "maker" by a special use of the word. To make poetry is then one of his activities, not probably the chief one but the one he likes best. It is a separate part of life: the idea of poetry as know that as he writes he is making his own life: and its activities, was certainly not his. He does not know that as he writes he is making his own life: he believes that in this act as in others he is merely, like the persons in his tales, living out the story allotted to him. It follows that as artist he is one, not with his creation but with the spectator of it. He travels with us, an infinitely vivacious and charming companion, always mindful of his duty to us, never forgetting that our pleasure depends upon his skill. He is most anxious to convince: he stops to argue against possible objections to his plot, he even tries to shift his responsibility on to the predecessor whom he humbly mistakes for the author of his work:

For-why to every lovere I me excuse,
That of no sentement I this endyte,
But out of Latin in my tonge it wryte.

What he really does is even more than to travel with us: he takes us up into "the hollowness of a sphere" from which we can look down with him upon "this litel spot of erthe" and see a crowd of men and women going their ways upon it—among them one called Geoffrey Chaucer—not too far below for us to see them as living contemporaries and recognise their emotions with sympathy and pity, but not near enough for their feeling to kindle ours, for the agony of their joy or sorrow to reawaken in us the passion of our own existence.

"The Genius of Chaucer," says an honoured critic, "is essentially dramatic." Certainly he has great delight in character, and the power of exhibiting it in action and in dialogue. But he is no dramatist. We have seen already that his tragedy is not really tragic, it has no lightnings in the dark, no breaking up of great deeps, it is only a story which begins happily and ends unhappily. His comedy is stronger, but it is not the art of the stage, it is the Comédie Humaine, a narrative art implying a different principle of creation. The true dramatist has a special relation to his personages: he has not merely observed them, he has made them, begotten them, endowed them with the very blood and breath by which he himself lives. However widely they may differ from him in character, part of him is reproduced in each of them;

and it is in those reproductions alone that he is visible to his audience. Between Chaucer and the persons in his stories this relation does not exist: they do not always share his life, and he is never content to be lost and found in them. He is often simply a reporter and always personally present with the audience. In short his genius is essentially narrative.

The distinction is worth making, because it is a significant one, and because it enables us to give Chaucer his true rank as the finest teller of stories who ever wrote in English verse. He is lacking just where the true dramatist excels, but he has all the qualities of the true story-teller. Perhaps the one which comes first to mind is that of humour, if only because of the originality which it implies. Chaucer has been called the first humorist of modern Europe, and the gulf between him and his predecessors is so great that the phrase is justified. There is, of course, humour in the stories of Boccaccio, but it is for the most part either clownish or satirical: it more often hurts than amuses the modern reader. The wit is either innuendo or mere common sense: the fun is the fun of the practical joke, or "score." This is not comedy, as Meredith has described it, "the singular scene of charity issuing of disdain under the stroke of honourable laughter." But Chaucer's humour does fit this description. The *Canterbury Tales* are, for the most part, a succession of just such scenes: they exhibit the weaknesses of human nature, but always without lashing them as vices. The stroke of honourable laughter resounds on all sides: the story-tellers

laugh at the stories and at each other, the Great Story-teller laughs at them and at himself. But the laughter with which he infects us is not the laughter of disdain or of horse-play, it is the subtle and almost silent laughter which comes from recognising human frailties and the curious deviations which they cause in human life. Even where there is complete disdain, as in the case of the Pardoner and the Somnour, there is never the least touch of magisterial or personal feeling. Even in the *fabliaux*, traditional anecdotes of the practical-joke type, the definition holds. The "Reeve's Tale" and the "Miller's Tale" are of the kind now considered unrepeatable, but they are not unreadable, because, in spite of their coarseness, there is nothing in them tending either to sensuality or cruelty. The Cambridge undergraduate was horribly revenged upon the miller, but to the miller's daughter, the real victim, he is represented as showing tenderness and even a kind of chivalry. In the "Merchant's Tale" the aged husband is deceived, but he is neither despised nor abused as he would have been in Boccaccio's book. The Carpenter of Oxenford is in similar case: the Miller tells the tale to bring contempt on him and his fellows, but Chaucer is perfectly impartial. For him the story is only an example of what naturally happens when an old and jealous man marries a girl of eighteen and keeps her "narrow in cage":

> Men sholdë wedden after hir estaat,
> For youthe and elde is often at debaat.

> But sith that he was fallen in the snare
> He must endure, as other folk, his care.

"His care"—the injury done to him—is not regarded as "conduct": it is simply a result, a state of things neither advocated nor deprecated. Chaucer's moral feeling is far too sensitive and too honest to class May's infidelity with Criseyde's unfaithfulness, or to ask the same sympathy for January as for Troilus. The one story belongs to the realm of farce, where fun is produced by juggling with the prosaic aspect of things; the other to that of tragedy, which can admit true humour, though, of course, only incidentally.

Incidentally, in this case, means chiefly in the part of Pandarus, a character of astonishing subtlety and vivacity. Inevitably, but very regrettably, Shakespeare has in this respect, as in others, gone far to spoil the story for us. Into his play on the Trojan War he has woven a version of it so abrupt and brutal that criticism has entirely failed to supply it with anything like an acceptable meaning. Bad as is the psychology of his Troilus and his Cressida, that of his Pandar is worse. Rather, there is none, the character is simply a thing to carry an old label: Pandar has no motive of his own. If this play had been the first suggestion, the rude sketch made in a primitive age, and Chaucer's the rationalised and refined picture developed from it, we could have found thanks for Shakespeare. As it is, we can but regret that he thought fit to amuse the Elizabethan

playgoer by scrawling so coarsely over a page which already bore Chaucer's beautiful handwriting. Pandarus has a motive: he is a human being from the first, the "fulle friend" of Troilus:

> "I wolë parten with thee al thy peyne,
> If it so be I do thee no comfort,
> As it is freendës right, sooth for to seyne,
> To enterparten wo, as glad desport.
> I have, and shal, for trewe or fals report,
> In wrong and right y-loved thee al my lyve:
> Hyd not thy wo from me, but telle it blyve."

And Troilus does tell him at last, though he refuses to believe in the possibility of any good coming of the confidence, for Pandarus is himself an unsuccessful lover.

> "This were a wonder thing," quod Troilus,
> "Thou coudest never in love thyselven wisse,
> How devil maystow bringen me to blisse?"

But Pandarus, delighted to find that the lady is his own niece, Criseyde, begins at once to enjoy the situation: and first remembers that Troilus is an old blasphemer against love.

> "For thou were wont to chace
> At Love in scorn, and for despyt him calle
> "Seynt Idiot, lord of thise foolës alle."
> How often hastow made thy nycë japes
> And seyd, that Lovës servants everichone
> Of nycetee ben verrey goddës-apes;
> And somë woldë monche hir mete alone,
> Ligging a-bedde, and make hem for to grone:

> And some, thou seydest, hadde a blaunchë fevere,
> And preydest God he sholdë never kevere!"

He then sets himself with the most intent forethought and cunning, to weave the web of deceit in which Criseyde is at last enmeshed. One of his devices is to get up a correspondence between the young couple. He prompts, though he will not write, the first letter on each side. These are his instructions to the lover:

> Touching thy lettere, thou are wys y-nough,
> I woot thou nilt it digneliche endyte;
> As make it with thise argumentës tough;
> Ne scrivenish or craftily thou it wryte;
> Beblotte it with thy terës eek a lyte:
> And if thou wryte a goodly word al softe,
> Though it be good, reherce it not too ofte.

There is no need to go through the plot in detail: it is enough to say that at every stage of it Pandarus shows a wonderful knowledge of the heart of man, and a still more wonderful knowledge of the ways of woman. He is himself a very complex character, almost a double personality. His object is one which he knows will not bear the light of day: and he pursues it unscrupulously, by every kind of deceit. But again and again we are bidden to mark the genuineness of the feeling which is his only motive. He has, no doubt, a gift of acting. He tells Criseyde she can do as she pleases about Troilus, to make him live or die:

> "But if ye lete him deyë, I wol sterve;
> Have here my trouthë, nece, I nil not lyen;

Al sholde I with this knyf my throtë kerve."
With that the terës brast out of his yën,
And seyde, "if that ye doon us bothë dyen
Thus giltlees, then have ye fisshèd faire:
What mendë ye, though that we bothe apeyre?"

But he is not merely an actor, he is one "that so wel coudë fele in everything," one who when he saw his friend's pain,

Wex wel nigh deed for routhë, sooth to seyne.

He is perfectly aware of his own false position: he reminds Troilus "in a sober wyse" of all that he has done for him out of sheer compassion.

"And have it brought to swich plyt as thou wost,
So that, thorugh me, thou stondest now in weye
To farë wel, I seye it for no bost,
And wostow why?—for shame it is to seye,
For thee I have begonne a gamen pleye
Which that I never doon shal eft for other
Although he were a thousand fold my brother.

That is to seye, for thee I am bicomen,
Bitwixen fame and ernest, swich a mene
As maken wommen unto men to comen:
Al sey I nought, thou wost wel what I mene."

To which Troilus, speaking no doubt for Chaucer as well as himself, responds by assuring him that he quite sees the distinction between his conduct and that of baser folk incited by "coveityse."

It remains only to add that the conversation of Pandarus throughout is garnished with proverbial and

vernacular expressions of the utmost vivacity. See how he flogs the timid lover:

> Quod Pandarus, "thou wrecched mouse's herte,
> Art thou agast so, that she wol thee byte?"

And how he lashes the fellows who boast of their imaginary acquaintance with great ladies:

> "Now lokë thanne, if they be nought to blame,
> Swich maner folk; what shal I clepe hem, what,
> That hem avaunte of wommen, and by name,
> That never yet behighte hem this ne that,
> Ne knewe hem morë than myn oldë hat?
> No wonder is, so God me sendë hele,
> Though wommen dredë with us men to dele."

I have ventured to speak at some length of Pandarus because I believe that he is not so well known as he ought to be. Of Chaucer's other great humourous creation, the "Wyf of Bath," there is surely no need to offer so long an account. As a character-study her Prologue goes far beyond any drama ever written: it is the revelation of a whole life, a whole personality, in a single unbroken speech of eight hundred lines. It reaches the high-water mark of Chaucer's humour, because it contains the maximum of malice with a still unfailing admixture of charity, and even of sympathy. It is thought that Chaucer's own married life was unhappy, and that he himself ascribed the unhappiness to the shrewish conduct of his wife. There are passages in some of the other poems which give colour to this theory, but the Wyf of Bath's Prologue is

remarkable for the evenness with which the blame seems to be distributed between the pair. The lady is no doubt a terrible termagant, but the most terrible thing about her is the certainty of the strokes with which she belabours her husbands. Whether he remembered it or not, Chaucer was beating himself when he gave her these lines to wield:

> Thou seydest eek, that there ben thingës three,
> The whichë thingës troublen al this erthe . . .
> Yet prechestow, and seyst, an hateful wyf
> Y-rekened is for oon of thise meschaunces;
> Ben ther none other maner resemblaunces
> That ye may lykne your parables to,
> But if a sely wyf be oon of tho?
> Thou lykenest wommanës love to helle,
> To bareyne land, ther water may not dwelle;
> Thou lyknest it also to wildë fyr;
> The more it brenneth, the more it hath desyr
> To consume everything that brent wol be.
> Thou seyst that right as wormës shende a tree
> Right so a wyf destroyeth hir husbonde:
> This knowë they that been to wyvës bonde.

Probably he did remember them only too well, for he shows what a mistake it is to make such charges, and how easily they are defeated. (The lady's boast that she invented them all herself is, of course, only a touch of her character—Chaucer knows better.)

> Lordinges, right thus, as ye have understonde,
> Bar I stifly myn olde housbondes on honde,
> That thus they seyden in hir dronkennesse;
> And al was fals, but that I took witnesse

On Janekin and on my nece also.
O lord, the peyne I dide hem and the wo,
Ful giltelees, by goddës swetë pyne!
For as an hors I coudë byte and whyne,
I coudë pleyn, thogh I were in the gilt,
Or ellës often tyme hadde I ben spilt,
Who-so that first to millë comth, first grint;
I pleyned first, so was our warre y-stint.
They were ful glad t'excusen hem ful blyve
Of thing of which they never agilte hir lyve.

But in all this long revelation of the shrewish and tyrannical in woman, the qualities most contrary to his ideal, there is never a trace of anger, never a moment when the voice becomes hard or harsh. On the contrary, it is plain that, in spite of all her faults, he sympathises with the wyf in her one most dominant characteristic, the zest of life.

But lord Crist! whan that it remembreth me
Upon my yowthe, and on my jolitee,
It tikleth me aboute myn hertë rote,
Unto this day it dooth myn hertë bote
That I have had my world as in my tyme.

Such lines as these remind us that Chaucer's humour is of the finest kind; it is not a succession of *tours de force*. It is not an external thing, a thing apart, it is a thread which runs through the whole fabric of his mind, and the fabric is so subtly woven of contrasts, that humour and earnest, or humour and pathos, are like the two colours in a piece of shot silk, only different aspects of one and the same material. When a humorous thought comes into Chaucer's mind

there is no break in his narrative mood: the light in his eyes is seen to change for a moment, the voice keeps the same key. The fact that Pandarus is in the same room with them does not make the relation between his lovers less perfect. I have already quoted the lines which describe their first meeting in church. It was not long afterwards that Criseyde saw Troilus riding home from battle through the streets of Troy, and marked, when the people cheered him "how sobreliche he castë doun his eyen," and waxed a little red for shame. The sight was like water to her thirst.

> Criseÿda gan al his chere aspyen,
> And let so softe it in hir hertë sinke
> That to hirself she seyde "who yaf me drinke?"

No description of her beauty could arouse in us such sympathy as these four words. They have their perfect echo on the night when Troilus holds her captive and finds that the surrender for which he is clamouring so desperately was brought about long ago, and not by any force of his.

> This Troilus in armës gan hir streyne
> And seyde, "O swete, as ever mote I goon,
> Now be ye caught, now is ther but we tweyne:
> Now yeldeth yow, for other boot is noon."
> To that Criseyde answerdë thus anon,
> "Ne hadde I ere now, my swetë hertë dere
> Ben yolde, y-wis I werë now not here!"

Her womanliness is not her weakness; love may con-

quer her, but her lover cannot. She tells him so with a noble frankness.

> "But natheless, this warne I yow," quod she,
> "A kingës sone al-though ye be, y-wis,
> Ye shal na-more have soverainetee
> Of me in love, than right in that case is;
> Ne I nil forbere, if that ye doon a-mis,
> To wrathen yow: and whyl that ye me serve,
> Cherycen yow right after ye deserve.
>
> And shortly, derë herte and al my knight,
> Beth glad, and draweth yow to lustinesse,
> And I shal trewëly, with al my might,
> Your bittre tornen al into swetenesse;
> If I be she that may yow do gladnesse,
> For every wo ye shal recovere a blisse":
> And him in armës took, and gan him kisse.

No one has ever seen more clearly than Chaucer, or drawn more perfectly, the difference in the attitudes of the two figures when a man stands face to face with his soul's mistress. On the one side hesitation, sheer force, panic, inspiration: on the other shame, pride, admiration, motherliness. This is his picture of that world-wide and age-old subject, "The Angel and the Ass." The scene is the lovers' first serious interview: she is asking his help in a business affair.

> This Troilus that herde his lady preye
> Of lordship him, wex neither quik ne deed,
> Ne mighte a word for shamë to it seye,
> Although men sholdë smyten off his head,
> But lord, so he wex sodeinliche reed,

And sire, his lesson, that he wendë conne,
To preyen hir, is through his wit y-ronne.

Criseyde al this aspyède wel y-nough,
For she was wys, and loved him never-the-lasse,
Al nere he malapert, or made it tough,
Or was too bold, to sing a fool a masse.

Troilus, on his side, is a man from head to heel: his clumsiness does not come from lack of feeling, but from the intensity of it. He is perceptive enough, he can take in the messages of love's wordless telepathy.

But thilkë litel that they speke or wroughte,
His wysë goost took ay of al swich hede
It semèd hir he wistë that she thoughte
Withouten word, so that it was no nede
To bidde him ought to doe, or ought forbede:
For which she thought that love, al come it late,
Of allë joye hadde opned hir the gate.

He knows that man's part in life is to serve and to be guided, that "the soul's armour is never well set to the heart unless a woman's hand has braced it"—

"But hertë myn, of your benignitee,
So thenketh, though that I unworthy be,
Yet mote I nede amenden in som wyse,
Right thourgh the vertu of your hyghe servyse,
And for the love of God, my lady dere,
Sin God hath wrought me for I shal yow serve,
As thus I mene, that ye wol be my stere,
To do me live, if that yow liste, or sterve,
So techeth me, how that I may deserve
Your thank, so that I through myn ignoraunce.
Ne do no-thing that yow be displeasaunce."

He knows that in the really great things insight goes beyond reason: he is eager that his lady should be his "stere." His only anxiety comes from a consciousness of his own unworthiness, and the consequent uncertainty of his place in her heart.

> "But natheless, myn owenë lady bright,
> Yit were it so that I wiste outrely
> That I, your humble servaunt and your knight,
> Were in your hertë set so fermëly
> As ye in mine, the which thing, trewëly,
> Me lever were than thisë worldës tweyne,
> Yet sholde I bet enduren al my peyne."

Time gives him the proof of this, and he has his reward. He becomes the best defender of his country, and, save Hector, the fighter most dreaded of the enemy.

> And this encrees of hardinesse and might
> Cam him of love, his ladie's thank to winne,
> That altered his spirit so withinne.

This is the highest point of the story, the glorious summer from which it declines sharply into the winter of our discontent. The end is inexplicable: Chaucer must make Criseyde unfaithful, for he cannot refuse to follow his "author," but he is perplexed and grieved. We are much less so, for the poet consoles others though he cannot console himself. His golden and unfailing kindliness gains upon us, it illumines the story to the end, and the memory of it, when day sinks, fills the twilight with significance. We see

that he will not condemn Criseyde, because he has loved her, and nothing that has been done can alter that. She was a perfect lover; she was unfaithful: how can this be reconciled? Are we to go back, and find that we were mistaken, that from the first she was a light woman, luxurious or merely frivolous? That may be Shakespeare's Cressid, never Chaucer's. Are we to go forward and re-open the story, demand some longer and more convincing account of the change in her? This is beyond Chaucer, and perhaps beneath him. He has a tolerance, a tenderness for human nature, which may almost be called faith. He cannot explain, he cannot make inconsistency reasonable: but he gives to the reader, perhaps without knowing it himself, the secret that men and women are what they are, and not by any means always what they do.

This, then, is the atmosphere of Chaucer's world, a kind of late afternoon sunshine, with some return of the freshness of the morning but with the tenderer shadows cast by a westering light. It may seem to work a very slight transformation of "real life" but the result is singularly complete and consistent, if it is looked at as a whole. In isolated passages, and sometimes in a single story, Chaucer may appear to be working almost in the key of spirited prose: his sketches of a sea-fight or a farmyard alarm are just brilliant sketches, one of his tales is a morality, another an anecdote, his sermon (if it be his) is a mere sermon. But if he is read largely and with understanding he will do for us what only a great

writer can do: he will impart some of the power and delicacy of his own vision, and so enrich the mind not merely with a new experience but with a new capacity for experience. A reader, old or young, may go to Chaucer for a story, a primitive jest, or even for a fact, an incident of a kind outside his own knowledge. He may get such things, prosaic things, there as elsewhere, and he may go away and do with them what he will, perhaps to his own detriment. But if he will only stay longer and travel further with Chaucer, he may learn to see with his eyes. That would be to create for himself some such world as Chaucer's—a world of high ideals, but of large tolerance, of frank masculine humour, but of the most perfect delicacy of feeling.

VII

THE APPROACH TO SHAKESPEARE

Richard the Second is not among the greatest of Shakespeare's plays, but it is one of the most interesting. It is full of poetry, it has deep though fitful dramatic insight, and as an historical study it is acute, just, and vividly set forth. But beyond all this it is of the first importance as an example of the development of Shakespeare's power and method—being indeed, in Swinburne's view, the record of his final struggle with the difficulties and traditional influences of the stage. If then it does not show either the poet or the Elizabethan drama at their highest, it still affords the best standpoint for the student of both, because it is within sight, at the same moment, of their origins and of their supreme attainment.

To understand that attainment fully we must begin by considering the nature of the processes involved in the creation of a poetic play—we must examine first the general problems which lie before all dramatists, and afterwards the special form in which they presented themselves to Shakespeare, and his gradual discovery, whether wholly or only partly conscious, of the way of mastery.

Every drama, whether in verse or prose, is, in the

strict sense of the word, a poem: but it is obviously a very different kind of poem from the lyric in its simplest and most direct form—very different, for instance, from the first line of Shelley's stanzas, "The sun is warm, the sky is clear." In such a line as that we have simply the external representation of a perception or intuition, we have, that is, simply the expression in words of something which has been seized by the æsthetic activity of the human spirit. But there is also an intellectual activity possible to the same spirit: Shelley, if he had chosen, might have gone on to use his perception of the sunlight and sky for the purposes of comparison, of generalisation, of argument; that is, he might have converted his intuitions into concepts, the expression of which in words would have been pure prose. He did, in fact, in the course of the poem, proceed to reason and compare: but the concepts which he thus formed, though intellectual in their nature, were immediately thrown into the crucible of the mind and so fused together in the poetic emotion that when uttered they are no longer prosaic at all. In fact, in the work of a poet who has attained mastery, the æsthetic and the intellectual materials are so effectually reduced to one substance that the whole mass becomes one single though highly complex intuition.

If this is the case with lyrical poetry, it is still more so with epic and other narrative poems. Here again we have the fusion of intuitions and thoughts, not more vivid or more deep, but of much greater extent than those from which a lyric is formed. But

we have also a new complication: that introduced by the fact that there are persons in the story. These, since their maker gives them human life, must, to a certain degree, have each his individual view, must, according to the nature of men, make and express their own world for themselves: yet they and all their separate worlds were merged in the poet's world, they and their reflections of reality are all again reflected in his master-mirror, they and their dreams are all things in his doubly creative dream.

When we come to the drama we find that we have advanced a long stage further: the persons in the story have become not only more individualised, but they are in a sense almost independent—the author's control over them is no longer absolute and undivided. A play is created avowedly and necessarily for an audience, and the existence of the audience is a limitation of the creative power which complicates the poet's work in a vitally important respect. We are not now considering the mere difficulties of stagecraft: we are facing a complete change in the standard of criticism. In one aspect a drama, like any other poem, any other work of art, is the result of an act of expression: and since no one but the artist himself has experienced the intuition which has been expressed, no one is so well able to judge whether the expression is adequate or not. In the case of the simpler forms of art—a pure lyric, or a study of a particular landscape or figure—this is the only criterion. The range of criticism is therefore very restricted: the reader or spectator can only pronounce upon the artistic value

of what he hears or sees if he has first succeeded in placing himself at the artist's point of view. He is, of course, entitled to refuse, to withhold his own personal sympathy from the work: he may say, "This is not an intuition which interests me, and therefore I shall not consider the degree of perfection with which it is expressed." He may go further and say, "This is not of a kind to move humanity, to interest the average man: it is not central, it is the intuition of a specialist, of a minor poet or artist." This is legitimate, but it is not criticism of art, because to move the average man was not the poet's aim—he wrote only to express himself.

In the case of drama—the form furthest from the simple lyric, the most objective form of creative art —this is not so. The effect on the audience is of the first importance—or at least of equal importance. The poet's aim is no longer merely to express; it is to express in such a way as to move the beholder. No doubt all poets wish to be read, and to be read with sympathy and approval: but to the rest of them, who are not playwrights, the audience is not essential. They may be minor poets making filigree, or major poets forging ploughshares: those will be read and loved by two or three, these perhaps by whole generations, one after another, but in the world of pure art there is no counting votes: "ce qui est bon vaut ce qui est bon." The poet may desire popularity, with good reason: but it does not directly cause or affect his effort, which aims only at expression. If Shelley had lived in a deserted world, it is as certain that he

would have made poetry as that his skylark would have still been singing though no Shelley had been there to hear him. To the dramatist alone the audience is a conscious motive, and a vital element in the problem. No doubt many a play has remained for ever unacted: some have even been written and printed "for the closet" only. But the words are merely a label: imaginatively, every play is composed to be acted, or rather, as if it were being acted—the conditions under which it comes into being are fundamentally affected by the imagination of the stage working upon the author's mind. A striking example of this is to be seen in Mr. Hardy's epic drama *The Dynasts,* where the crowd of actors is so great and the scenery so vast in scale that the only theatre in which it can ever be performed is the reader's own mind: but that does not in any important way affect its structure, or differentiate it from the more ordinary stage-plays: for they too all have their first performance in the imagination, where the audience is none the less present because the author is there alone.

Thus for the dramatist the standard of criticism is a double one. He cannot be content with expression only: nor can he be content with passing the would-be objective test which satisfied the Greeks—that the work of art should, in Professor Butcher's phrase, "realise its own idea" and so attain perfection. This demand, since the artist alone knows fully what is the idea of his work, is not really distinguishable from the other: it is not truly an objective test. But the

audience is truly outside the artist, and does impose upon him a second test. In considering a play, therefore, we have always these two questions before us: first, how does this express the maker as a poem—how does it succeed in bodying forth the whole mass of intuitions and ideas which had been seized by his spiritual activity? And secondly, how does this affect those who hear and see it, as a drama? To these we may add a third question, of special interest in the case of Shakespeare and the Elizabethan stage: how far has the author succeeded in satisfying simultaneously both the demands made upon him? Are there any traces of a conflict between his own standard and that of his actual audience, and if so, did he always maintain his own?

We may now turn from these general considerations and inquire what was the nature of the work to which Shakespeare addressed himself when he sat down to write the play before us. He approached it undoubtedly from the practical side. The theories of art evolved by his contemporaries were generally those of men more formally educated: his best poetry was to them only "his native wood-notes wild," and at this early stage in his career he had not even come within the range of Ben Jonson's influence. That he was aiming at self-expression and dramatic effect goes without saying—he could not write plays without doing so, any more than a boy can learn to swim without obeying the laws of gravity and mechanics. But there is nothing in the early plays to show that premeditation, or the conscious marshalling of ideas

and principles, was any part of Shakespeare's original method. It is very necessary to be clear at the outset that if we speak of the problems which confronted the author of *Richard the Second,* we are using the words in a strictly limited sense: we are not asserting a general belief in definite and deliberate intentions. Intentions, no doubt, Shakespeare had, and it is easy to see that they widened and deepened as he went from strength to strength: but to attribute to conscious pre-existing intention not only the most vital and distinguishing elements in his work, but even his minutest details, his faults and his felicities alike, is to make him an exception, and a contradictory exception, to all that we know of human genius. The highest powers of man are not his to command, but they are his to summon. He can call spirits from the vasty deep: that deep is in some subliminal foundation of his own nature and the spirits are in a sense his own, but they are also greater and more universal than any self. That they will come when they are called can never be predicted: nor could even Shakespeare himself tell what they would do for him. He builded better than he knew: he builded better than he meant to build. On the other hand, since he was human, subject to the natural incidents of growth and weakness, his work, both in plan and in detail, progressed gradually and not always consistently towards perfection.

Far too little account has been taken of this: otherwise there would be no longer any valid reason for writing one more word about Shakespeare. But for

many years past not only the criticism of his work, but the general estimate of his genius, and even of his character, has been desiccated and sterilised by the adulatory methods of the makers of books and speeches about "our greatest poet." Our greatest poet he remains, but it is impossible to read many even of the more serious commentators on his plays without risk of carrying away—especially from the works of those who have written in German—the impression of a sort of literary Demiurge, a Creator on an almost theological scale, shaping the material of life with mere omnipotence, deliberately breathing upon it with the breath of an infinite wisdom, and then leaving it untouched because he saw that it was good. Those who expound Shakespeare from this standpoint do not overestimate his achievement, but they destroy it: they do not stimulate, they enfeeble, the sense of wonder and sympathy with which we should look upon a man under the same conditions as ourselves, but with an unrivalled power of transcending them. They have so wearied us with their microscopic eulogy, and so stunned us with their high-frequency enthusiasm, that the majority of Shakespeare's countrymen have come to revere him conventionally—as the centre of a creed rather than the subject of real beliefs. This is the inevitable consequence of regarding a nature like our own, at once human and divine, from the wrong side: of treating Shakespeare as a god who ended by dying, rather than as a man who rose at times above the earth-mist.

In no other case of great poetical genius is there

less excuse for this cardinal error. We know enough of Shakespeare's education and of the circumstances in which the early plays were written, to be in no doubt of the purely instinctive and practical nature of his first efforts. He was a grammar-school boy from the country, who came up to London at the age of twenty-two, with no resources but those of his own personality. So far as we know the man—our evidence is mainly inferential, but none the worse for that—his more important traits were these. He had a strong, quick vitality, and as the most natural accompaniments of this, great curiosity and acquisitiveness, physical, intellectual, and imaginative. He was of the sanguine temperament, amorous, genial, emulous, with no timidity in face of law or custom, no diffidence, no hesitation in seizing an opportunity, orthodox or unorthodox. Against this absence of scrupulousness must be set his deeply sensitive moral nature, which though it could not always govern his impulses, never gave a false account of them. These are qualities not uncommon among men of our race: the combination of them may be said to make one of the types of English character. What is uncommon in Shakespeare is the great force of each of the opposing elements, and the immediate and ever-increasing effect of their interaction. On the one hand, the full pulse of his nature was not lowered, as it might have been by the constant refusal of experience; on the other hand, self-knowledge—knowledge of the whole immense range of base and noble possibilities—brought power instead of weakness to his vision, and

ended by giving to his judgments of humanity a golden tolerance, a true reflection of that radiance which shines upon just and unjust alike.

This union of unhesitating and rather coarse vigour with extreme moral sensitiveness, of a genially overbearing vitality with an undimmed sense of the distinction between good and evil, has often given rise to a charge of hypocrisy against our nation: a charge which we only deserve when we hide the moral sanity of our real judgment too completely under the vestments of convention. Shakespeare lived in an age which offered him no temptation to do this. The coarse wit which we have banished to the men's apartments, the high imagination and passionate sincerity which we tolerate only from favourite poets or preachers—for both of these he could find a ready welcome in the playhouse; and when we condemn the Elizabethans for their undeniable brutality we should remember to bring the whole of the facts into the account. There remains one point in which we seem at the present time to have parted, perhaps for ever, from Shakespeare and his generation—we have not that innate love of polyphloisboisterous rhetoric, of a constant accompaniment on what would now be derided as "the big drum." It is no loss to us that our spiritual ear has become too delicate to enjoy bombast: but we must accept the fact that a love for the resounding, a fondness for eloquence, even over the killing of a calf, was an early taste with Shakespeare, and one so closely connected with his poetical

mood that it is often most difficult in a fine passage to separate the splendour from the magniloquence.

It is certain that these qualities were all the means of livelihood that Shakespeare brought with him to London, but they seem to have been the best possible business capital for the place and time. There is no evidence that he ever had to suffer the extremes of poverty or of hope deferred. He may, as the story goes, have earned money on his first arrival by holding horses at the playhouse door: but he was soon employed by the actors within: soon afterwards a member of their company, a collaborator with their best writers, a maker of successful plays of his own, and within ten years a rich enough man to relieve his family and buy the largest house in his native town. The point to mark about this rapid prosperity is that it was mainly commercial in character. It was based of course upon artistic success: but whereas in the great majority of cases it is by long and lonely persistence that the artist creates the taste which he alone can satisfy, in the new world upon which Shakespeare was adventuring there was a market already made for him. Drama was in demand: in the companies kept by the great nobles of the time there were actors in plenty: but who was to supply the plays? For the moment the situation seemed to be at the mercy of four young men, all practically Shakespeare's contemporaries in age: Kyd, Peele, Greene, and Marlowe.[1] The youngest of the four was

[1] Lyly too had a distinct influence on Shakespeare, but he was not among the dramatists who were writing for the public playhouses.

by far the greatest: in the very year in which Shakespeare came to London, Marlowe produced him *Tamburlaine the Great,* and, so doing, first opened the true fountain of English blank verse. Greene was an influence of an almost opposite kind: if his melodious, undramatic trick of putting rhymed verse into the mouth of his characters ensnared Shakespeare for a time, it must be remembered to his credit that the humour of *Henry IV* and the later plays often seem to have an echo of his genial English voice. Kyd and Peele had no power upon Shakespeare's style: but one or both wrote plays which Shakespeare amended, and was content to see printed as his own. Their badness and his indifference are strong evidence that he regarded his works rather as property than as triumphs of art or the base of a poetic reputation.

The history of this group of five young men during the years from 1586 to 1596 has been minutely studied: but the dates cannot all be ascertained with exactness, and the inexactness is greater than it appears, because even when we have fixed the production of a given play within a year or so, we cannot tell how long it actually took to write. Elaborate calculations based upon developments of style would be entirely upset if a play could be reasonably supposed to have been begun under one influence and finished years afterwards under another. But even if some future antiquarian, gleaning after Sir Sidney Lee, should discover evidence of this kind, it would not disprove the influences we are now considering: the streams would be differently mapped, but their

volume and general direction would remain the same.

We know of no work that can be assigned to Shakespeare's hand during the first three years of his life in London. But amongst the mass of literary treasure which lay open to his acquisitiveness were the following plays: Marlow's *Tamburlaine,* Part I. 1585-6, and Part II. 1586-7, *Faust,* 1587-8, and *The Jew of Malta,* 1589; Peele's *Edward I,* 1588. It cannot be doubted that Greene's plays were also familiar to him, and it is evident that the same causes which resulted in Peele's *King John* and Marlowe's *Edward II*—both produced about 1590—must have been then at work in Shakespeare too. The effect was immediate, and such as might have been expected: the new apprentice began first to turn out comedies—*Love's Labour's Lost, The Two Gentlemen of Verona, The Comedy of Errors,* and a tragedy—*Romeo and Juliet*—and then took up historical drama. Between 1591 and 1594 appeared *Henry VI, Richard II, Richard III,* and *King John.*

All these plays are the work of a new mind, but of a new mind working on old lines. *Love's Labour's Lost* and *The Comedy of Errors* are for all their originality conventional in structure: *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* is founded on a play of 1584 with a Spanish original: *Romeo and Juliet* owes much to the *Romeus and Juliet* of one Brooke. Of the three Parts of *Henry VI* one appears to have been originally written by Marlowe, one by Greene and Peele, one by the three of them in collaboration: Shakespeare's task was to revise and retouch—in fact to

make a more acceptable acting version for an audience which was beginning to love the sound of his voice. He undertook a still more menial job of the same kind when, a little later, he dished up the horrible pasty of *Titus Andronicus*. It may well be imagined that however much of a handy man and a man of business he might be, a poet of genius would not for long endanger his native ardour by work like this: he might lend a kindling spark or two, but his own flame must have sufficient room to burn. In what was really his he would give all men—managers, actors, and audience—what they wanted, but, as Mr. Bradley has finally said, in doing so he gave them also what they never dreamed of. In *Richard II.* he dared greatly: he gave them patriotism, the splendour of Royalty, and its tragical eclipse: but humour and horrors he denied them altogether, and bore down the balance with poetry in irresistible profusion.

It is not necessary to believe that in doing this he was deliberately making an experiment, or attempting to change either the character or the style of English historical drama. The materials upon which he worked were familiar, and were suggested to him in the familiar way. Marlowe's play on the deposition of Edward II., and two, if not three, on Richard II., by obscurer writers, had already appeared: it has been conjectured that Shakespeare incorporated fragments of one of these in the latter part of his own version. There is nothing against this conjecture, except the insufficiency of the reason for making it, namely, the supposed difficulty of accounting for the

scenes in Act V, dealing with Aumerle's conspiracy. But the introduction of the Duchess of York is the only point here in which the play adds to the original material: the rest is all supplied by the authority from which Shakespeare took his history of Richard II.

This authority was the same which had already been used by the joint authors of *Henry VI.*, namely, the "Chronicles of Raphaell Holinshed," and it is to be remarked that the account there given could hardly have been more faithfully followed. Shakespeare's purpose was to write an effective drama, and he therefore compressed or slightly altered a series of events where he could by so doing improve a dramatic effect. But this was merely the skilled turn of the craftsman's hand: there is nowhere visible any tendency to play with events or to warp character for the enforcing of a preconceived theory, moral or political, or for the illustration of a contrast existing rather in imagination than in fact. What we see is an effect not of theory or of illustration, but of insight. When a great artist, conscious of his own powers and absolute master of them, sets forth, like Milton, to justify the ways of God as he conceives them, or like Ibsen, to symbolise the spiritual forces which underlie our common life, he makes, from whatever materials, a story of his own, built to carry his purpose: he creates universal truth out of imaginary or impossible details. It is indisputable that Shakespeare reached this mastery, but he reached it gradually, and remained to the

end more instinctive than logical, and more interpretative than inventive.

It is therefore a mistake to begin the study of an early play like *Richard II.* by laying too much stress on the general ideals to be found in it: by discovering that "treachery in some form is at the root of all Shakesperean tragedy," that "everybody in the play is in passionate relation to the central idea," and that "Richard is presented to us both as a traitor and the betrayed." Such observations are true, but they are not, as is alleged, "proofs of the greatness of Shakespeare's vision." They record only a view of the facts, and a view which must have occurred to any mind, even of the most ordinary, to which those facts were presented by the Chronicler. The student of *Richard II.*, if his desire is to understand as much as possible of the character and greatness of Shakespeare's vision, would do better to consider its working rather than its results. He might well begin by reading the play through at a sitting, with a mind cleared, as far as possible, of all previous suggestions, and particularly of the suggestions that he is studying the work of one having authority, or gifted with plenary inspiration. He should next read the first and second Act of Greene's *James the Fourth* and the fifth Act of Marlowe's *Edward II.*: then turn to Holinshed and go through the forty pages which begin with the challenge between Hereford and Mowbray. The impression received from the play itself will of course be widely different in different cases: some will be attracted, some repelled, by the character

of Richard; some will find the dramatic interest inferior to that of Marlowe's piece, while others will be chiefly struck by the magic of words with which the prose narrative has been transformed. But whenever the unbiased judgment is set to work upon the play and its sources together, with a clear understanding of the circumstances in which it came into existence, I believe that the following will be among the points most generally recognised.

1. Shakespeare did not conceive of himself as an artist, but as a playwright. He was not free to use the story of Richard's fall as mere material for a tragedy; he could not make a Lear out of the Chronicles of England. The preference of his audience at that time was for an account of tragical events as they were believed to have happened: he was himself moved by patriotic feeling in the same direction. In short, his business was to produce not only drama, but history. His *Richard II.* is history as history was understood by Thucydides: it is something more too, but it is in one aspect history—a series of events expressed by the spiritual activity of a single observer. Swinburne has well described it: "the author's first attempt at historical drama: it would perhaps be more accurate to say, at dramatic history."

2. The fact that he was to work upon these lines involved a limitation of the means at his disposal. For that transfiguration of life which was to move his audience he must rely on two powers only: the power of making character live by the imaginative presentment of it, and the power of making speech

live by the eloquent and poetic presentment of it. These powers he had, and he was no doubt conscious of them—conscious as the strong man is conscious of his strength, instinctively but not intellectually. In a sense he knew that he was about to use his powers: he was aware that the king and the kingdom which he was to set before his audience would be his and no longer those of the Chronicler. But that is only to say that he had grasped his material and given it form, expressed it tacitly within himself; and was moved to externalise that expression in words. This is true of Holinshed too, for history is generically poetry: the historian and the poet are distinguished by the difference of their purposes, and also as a rule by a difference in the rhythmic use of language. Of the intimate connection between these two—purpose and rhythm—there is no more instructive example than the play before us: but the union is the result of impulse, not of forethought.

3. Shakespeare's grasp of his material is here unequal: his intuition is not perfect throughout. Naturally his imagination seized first and most strongly upon the characters of Richard and Bolingbroke. They are both of them completely alive, consistent and convincing. The brief, bare notes of the Chronicler have been expanded to a full and poignant account: they have been understood in their full significance, understood as Holinshed himself failed to understand them, if we may judge from the chaotic and sententious summary with which he closes Richard's reign. The sketch of Bolingbroke is drawn with fewer

strokes, but the insight, the life-giving process, are the same; there is the same miracle of consistent growth: it is as if a pair of seemingly dry, dead stems had quickened and put forth leaves, each after his kind. This cannot be said of the minor characters in anything like the same degree. They do, of course, show vital touches here and there; but by comparison with Richard and Bolingbroke they can hardly be said to be characters at all. We are no more sure at the end of the play than we were at the beginning, what they would be likely to think, say, or do in a fresh set of circumstances. We know in what voice they would speak: but as it is for the most part the undifferentiated voice of Shakespeare, the more consistently they speak in it the less truly and dramatically consistent are they with any personality discoverable in themselves. The worst perhaps is York, for he has a considerable part and might have been a great figure. He has been described by Swinburne as "an incomparable, an incredible, an unintelligible and a monstrous nullity." Unintelligible he certainly is, and it is significant that he is unintelligible not only in the play, but in Holinshed, and, it may be added, in Froissart as well. Probably he was a nullity in real life. But he would not have remained so for a moment if the creative thought of Shakespeare had once brooded upon him. His brother Gaunt is also a nullity in the Chronicles, and makes only a short and transient appearance in the play: but there he lives by the passionate intensity of his indignation and his patriotism.

4. In this play, if we turn from the characters to the speeches which they utter, a striking peculiarity is noticeable: the method absolutely halts between two totally different styles, the verse being partly blank verse and partly rhymed. These two styles being means of expression, vitally related to the feeling or thought with which they deal, the inconsistency involved in their mixed use is a very serious one. Its effect is to produce on each occasion not a discord perhaps, but a sudden and violent change of key. As the change is always at the end of a speech or scene, and from the stronger to the weaker form, an anti-climax or sense of loss results, though this is no doubt exactly the opposite of what the author was feeling after. His use of this mixed method has been always taken, and rightly, for a sign of immaturity, and since he gradually abandoned it, attempts have been made by calculating the different percentages of rhyming lines in the different plays, to discover the exact order in which they were written. But Dr. Herford has pointed out that as *Romeo and Juliet* and *Richard II.* each contain about six times as many rhymes as any other play of the first ten years, this would place them, where it is certain they ought not to be placed, as the earliest of Shakespeare's works. Professor Dowden explains the discrepancy by suggesting that Shakespeare in writing certain plays had "special incentives to rhyme." He had: but as to the kind of incentive the view of Swinburne seems to be more penetrating. He does not, like Professor Dowden, believe that "Shakespeare deliberately em-

ploys rhyme for certain definite purposes." In his view the mixed method is evidence of "the struggle between the worse and the better genius of the author. " 'Tis now full tide, 'tween night and day." The author of *Selimus* is visibly contending with the author of *Faustus* and *Edward II.* for the mastery of Shakespeare's poetic and dramatic adolescence." This is the opinion of one who was himself a great poet and dramatist. If it be adopted the question becomes no longer one of dates but of moods: Shakespeare suffered a strong recurrence, doubtless quite involuntary, of the elegiac and idyllic mood of Greene, at the moment when he was on the point of passing finally into the masculine and truly dramatic mood of Marlowe. *Richard III.* on the contrary, according to Swinburne, "belongs absolutely to the School of Marlowe. . . . Shakespeare has decidedly chosen his side." He therefore believes it to have been written after *Richard II.*, and not, as Dr. Herford has argued, immediately before it.

5. The story of the play, whether we consider it as drama or as history, must of course have a meaning: since it has been grasped and expressed by the activity of a human spirit, its details cannot be unrelated to one another, but must be seen to form parts of a coherent and reasonable whole. Undoubtedly the meaning of this play is the contrast between the personality of Richard as a man and his position as the inheritor of a great kingdom. The contrast is heightened by the gradual exhibition of Bolingbroke as the man fit to be king, where Richard is only the man

born to be king. The philosophical reflections naturally induced by this are far-reaching and deeply painful: since all that is crafty, cold, and common succeeds, and reasonably succeeds, where so much that is beautiful and sensitive fails and is universally rejected, the union in one man of the beauty of power and the beauty of personality, the ideal of human kingship, is no part or possibility of the real world. This thought, and many others connected with it, spring like smouldering fire into our minds from Shakespeare's mind, where they were first kindled. But, once more, they do not form a "central idea" in the sense of a preconceived doctrine: they are inherent in the "situation," natural reflections on the given facts, instinctively made by the author and enforced to the utmost of his growing power. To say this is not in any degree to diminish their value or Shakespeare's genius: it is only to remind the student that in the working of that genius the ideas did not beget the play but came into being with it, as the mind comes into being with the body. In no other belief could we get the best out of two seemingly opposed views like those of Samuel Johnson and Walter Pater. Johnson is no adorer of the all-wise and all-powerful maker of a mimic world: for him Shakespeare not only "seems to write without any moral purpose . . . his precepts and axioms drop casually from him," but "the plots are often so loosely formed that a very slight consideration may improve them; and so carelessly pursued that he seems not always fully to comprehend his own design. . . ."

Again, "in many of his plays the latter part is evidently neglected. When he found himself near the end of his work and in view of his reward, he shortened the labour to snatch the profit." Finally, "in tragedy his performance seems constantly to be worse, as his labour is more . . . whenever he solicits his invention, or strains his faculties, the offspring of his throes is tumour, meanness, tediousness, and obscurity."

This criticism is too much like castigation: it proves that Shakespeare was a man, by treating him rather like a schoolboy. The other point of view is Pater's: for him Shakespeare is "an exquisite poet . . . able to see all things poetically, to give a poetic turn to his conduct of them, and refreshing with his golden language the tritest aspects of that ironic contrast between the pretensions of a king and the actual necessities of his destiny." For him Richard is "a figure —that sweet lovely rose—which haunts Shakespeare's mind, as it seems long to have haunted the minds of the English people, as the most touching of all examples of the irony of kingship. . . . His grief becomes nothing less than a central expression of all that in the revolutions of Fortune's wheel goes *down* in the world. . . . No, Shakespeare's kings are not, nor are meant to be, great men."

If Johnson's essay has too little reverence, this has perhaps too much. But it must be possible to learn something of Pater's sympathy and subtlety without falling into superstition: and on the other hand to recognise that a genius may be a man of business too

—if only he hath his business in great waters. It will be more, and not less, to us, that Shakespeare ventured into strange seas, if we are with him from the start: we shall see more and not less beauty in the treasures he brought back, if we have been present at their discovery ourselves.

II

The method of approach which I have advocated is not less useful for the study of the individual characters in the play. Here, too, we have extremes to avoid. Kreyssig, an acute and learned critic of detail, goes so far as to speak of the play as "a masterpiece of political poetry, in the best sense of the word." In his opinion too, "Richard's behaviour shows throughout a very excitable, fine-feeling heart." Swinburne, on the other hand, considers "the protagonist of the play as so pitifully mean and cruel a weakling that (after the third scene) no future action or suffering can lift him above the level which divides and purifies pity from contempt. And this," he continues, "if mortal manhood may venture to pass judgment on immortal Godhead, I must say that Shakespeare does not seem to me to have seen." Such are the dilemmas into which superstition will lead us. Is not the plain fact here that Richard is not always a fine-feeling heart, nor always a mean and cruel weakling: and is not the simple explanation of this and other inconsistencies the equally plain fact that the play is not a "masterpiece" breathed forth by an

"immortal Godhead," but a stage-play by a very young man of genius, taking one of the most enigmatical characters in the history of England, and making a set of brilliant guesses at the inner working of it?

Let us again look at the process before we judge of the result. Fuller material is supplied by Holinshed for the character of Richard than for any other of the dramatis personae; and there can be little doubt that Shakespeare had some knowledge besides this to draw upon—possibly something learned at school, or something gleaned from Froissart and other books. The traditional characters of the kings of England have been handed down from one generation to another with considerable distinctness, and on the whole they have stood the test of scientific revision. Moreover, Shakespeare was no farther away from the reign of Richard II. than we are from the age of Queen Anne. But, on the other hand, he would naturally allow himself greater freedom in dealing with the inward than with the outward life of his characters. The soul is judged only by its Maker; and of these souls, at once more real and less real than their originals, he was within limits the maker. If then we compare the characters of the historical persons with the characters of the persons in the play, it will be not for the purpose of criticism, but in order to observe the way in which Shakespeare was working at this stage of his career.

The salient events in Richard's life were these. As a fatherless child, and heir-apparent to the crown, he

was the subject of anxiety to his grandfather, Edward III., who took the precaution, before his own death, of making the boy's uncles swear fealty to him. It was always thought that John of Gaunt's unscrupulous ambition was the danger thus guarded against, and it is probable that from an early age Bolingbroke was regarded both by his father and by himself as having a fair chance of the succession. Richard came to the throne as a boy of ten, under strict guardianship. At fourteen he distinguished himself by a bold and successful piece of acting in face of Wat Tyler and his revolted villeins. At fifteen he married Anne of Bohemia, to whom he became so tenderly attached that on her death, twelve years later, he razed to the ground the palace at Sheen where he had lived with her.

Under the tutelage of his uncles, first of Lancaster and afterwards of Gloucester, he carried on the government extravagantly, and made favourites. In 1386 Gloucester threatened him with deposition, and in the following year joined with the Earls of Derby, Nottingham, Arundel, and Warwick, under the title of Lords Appellant, to attack his party, of whom some were ruthlessly executed, while his chief friend, De Vere, was driven into exile and died abroad. For two years Richard submitted, but in 1389, being then twenty-two, he took the reins, with quiet decision, into his own hands. For seven years more he ruled peaceably, waiting for his revenge. In September, 1396, he brought home De Vere's embalmed body and buried it with significant ceremony: in October he

married Isabella of France and made a long truce with that country, in direct opposition to Gloucester's outspoken policy of war. Then his plans ripened suddenly and he struck down his enemies. A second set of Lords Appellant helped him to his revenge. Gloucester was captured and sent to Calais, where he was strangled in the castle, under the custody of Nottingham. Derby, another of the old faction, also came over to Richard, Warwick was banished, and Arundel went to the block on Tower Hill.

Derby and Nottingham—now Dukes of Hereford and Norfolk—had thus escaped alone, probably each in dread of the other. Hereford, the more astute, had also more to lose: he soon succeeded in entangling Norfolk in his talk, and denounced him to the king. The remainder of the story is given with substantial accuracy in the play. The earlier events are of value to us because they throw light upon the character of the persons whose reanimated selves are about to act out the rest before us. They make it clear to us, and they made it no doubt clear to Shakespeare too, that the Richard of history was not a typically weak, mean, or unmanly creature. He was admittedly extravagant, wilful, pleasure-loving, and unwarlike: self-centred too, and self-admiring. Yet he had real beauty of mind and person, real fascination for his friends: and he had repeatedly proved himself a man of high courage in emergency, of consummate and long-enduring craft, of deep as well as passionate affections. The suddenness and completeness of his fall is to this day surprising: for he had outplayed

stronger men than Bolingbroke, he had outplayed Bolingbroke himself up to the moment when he so incredibly threw the game away. Being double-natured, he was in the end self-defeated, overthrown not so much by a man as by a wantonly provoked accident.

Now to anyone attempting to unravel this tangle there are in several parts of it threads which appear specially worth following: and Shakespeare has followed them all except one. That one is Richard's habit of far-sighted and long-enduring duplicity. When we remember how he had for so many years clung to his revenge, kept the secret of his determination so close, and brought it at last to such complete success, we seem to see a possible meaning in his strangely abject surrender to Bolingbroke. For the moment he was too weak to resist—force could only provoke and justify superior force. But so long as he lived and left aggression without excuse, his party could work for him and take advantage of the usurper's mistakes. The rising of Surrey and Essex within three months of his deposition failed by a series of treasons and accidents: that under Hotspur two years later came nearer success: and it was not till Northumberland's defeat and death in 1408 that Henry IV. was safe on his throne. But this was not Shakespeare's line of thought: in his view, whatever Richard's friends hoped and plotted was outside the agony of the king's own fall: and in depicting that agony he confined himself to the other threads which he had grasped. First, there was Richard's love of

pageantry. It was this which led him to ordain the gorgeous combat in the lists at Coventry, which practically fills the first Act of the play, and was in fact the last of three magnificent trial scenes—all predestined to end in the destruction of both the dangerous appellants. The Irish expedition, which followed, was of a like origin probably, for Richard was no follower of war for its own sake. Closely connected with this trait is the love of symbols: the historical Richard with his badge of the sun obscured by clouds, or impaling the arms of the Confessor with his own, or kneeling in his portrait among Saints and Angels, with the jewel of the White Hart couchant round his neck—this is the same Richard who again and again dwells on the mystic emblems of his coronation, the crown, the sceptre, the anointing balm, which symbolise a right conferred by heaven and not to be taken away by any "breath of worldly men." The sudden assertion and equally sudden abandonment of this right in the crisis at the beginning of Act III is in keeping with another of the characteristics which Shakespeare had marked—Richard's waywardness, the unaccountable element in him which caused his nature not only to contradict itself, but to do so by sharp turns, whether of passion or frivolity. And lastly, there was his power of words. Here Shakespeare has naturally enough—since words are the very pigments of his art—added to Richard's recorded wit the whole colour-range of his own eloquence, and even that curious dazzling effect of false brilliance produced by playing on the double or treble meanings of words.

This is not a dramatic device, as some have supposed; it is a foible not of this or that character in the play, but of Shakespeare himself, and instinctively imported by him not only into some of Richard's speeches, but into other intensely felt utterances such as those of Gaunt in Act II, Scene 1, and the Queen in Act III, Scene 4.

These, then, are the main threads which Shakespeare tried to separate out from the historical tangle and plait into a coherent whole. In the reading of the play his success will be apparent; apparent also the fact that the work is unevenly done, sometimes with the violence of a young hand eager to clinch an effect.

Bolingbroke's character presented no such difficulty as Richard's. His career was the career of a commonplace man, and it ran its full course: we know more of it than Shakespeare did, and he when he came to write *Henry IV.* knew more than when he wrote *Richard II.*, but in all the pictures the man is always the same man. Bolingbroke is success personified, and in his success, although it carried him to the highest possible point of ambition, there is nothing in the least romantic, because there is nothing unforeseen, unprepared—one might almost say, nothing undeserved. He was the man for the place, and when the hour came, the only man for the hour. The first—perhaps the only—truly political nation in Europe never did a more businesslike political day's work than when they put away Hereditary Right, personal charm, and moral irresponsibility, in favour of this

solid, trustworthy, practical, vulgar ability. Henry's ability had moreover been proved step by step, and always where Richard's inefficiency had been most conspicuous. He was only a year older than the king, but he had at twenty-one been one of the five Lords Appellant who corrected and dominated him. He had shone in tournaments where Richard made no appearance at all, had travelled abroad in almost royal state, and had joined in two campaigns, in Prussia and Barbary, with a force under his immediate command. His position at home may be gauged by the fact that in Richard's expedition into Scotland in 1386 the contingent provided by the house of Lancaster numbered 1050 men of arms and 3050 archers, while the royal troops only amounted to 800 men of arms and 2050 archers, and of the other great nobles, including the king's remaining uncles, none of them brought half as many. The estates of this gigantic Duchy, Bolingbroke's inheritance, were reputed to be nearly one-third of the land of England: and the powerlessness of the two successive boy Earls of March, who alone stood nearer to the throne, must have served by contrast to exalt his prestige. Yet his head was never turned to giddiness: he waited with perfect self-control, until the confiscation of his lands threatened the substantial basis of his power. In the flush of his triumph he was equally cool and wary: he left the necessary violence to partisans like Northumberland, while he professed to be moved by the unbending loyalty of men like the Bishop of Carlisle, and to regret the death of Richard. Shake-

speare had no need here to depart from his authorities: this smooth, impeccable, remorseless conqueror, perfectly equipped and perfectly balanced, is a more terrible antagonist to set against light and reckless folly than perhaps any other, certainly than any more abstract personification of Nemesis could be. In *Henry IV.* we are shown that he too had weaknesses, misgivings, miseries: the development of his character is followed with consistency, historical and dramatic, and there are phrases which throw back flashes of light upon the Bolingbroke of 1399, but the picture is drawn from a different point of view and in the style of a later and much more advanced period. It would be a mistake to study it before the impression of the earlier play had been fixed and analysed.

John of Gaunt is an example of precisely the opposite kind. The man we see in the play—"the one thoroughly noble and nobly coherent figure in the poem"—as Swinburne calls him—was never born in the world of mortals. The historical John, the third son of Edward III., was born at Ghent in 1340, and was therefore fifty-eight when he died. He had acquired vast possessions by his first marriage with Blanche, sole heiress of the House of Lancaster: but his life was one of restless and disappointed ambition. He conducted unsuccessful campaigns in France in the seventies, and in Spain in the eighties: between these two absences he achieved great unpopularity in England by his term of government as Richard's guardian. His second marriage was a royal one—to Constance of Castile—and he married two of his

daughters to the Kings of Spain and Portugal: but his third wife, Catharine Swinford, was neither noble nor respectable, and the legitimation of her children was one of Richard's most tactless indiscretions. Lancaster's death is recorded by Holinshed in two or three lines: but a vague legend of greatness seems to have clung about his name, and it was probably by no violation of common tradition that Shakespeare chose him to utter the dying passion of the England of chivalry.

Edmund of Langley, Earl of Cambridge and afterwards Duke of York, was the fourth son of Edward III. Historically it is difficult to explain how he could ever have been appointed to the Regency, a position to which he was always unequal: and Shakespeare has not taxed his imagination to find a solution of the puzzle. In taking him exactly as he found him he has sacrificed artistic truth, for he has made him unintelligible. It only remains to add that the real York was twice married: first to Isabella of Castile, the mother of Aumerle and his other children, and secondly to Joan Holland, daughter of Thomas, Earl of Kent, and therefore sister to the Duke of Surrey and niece to Richard himself. She was about sixteen years of age at the date of the attempted rising against Henry IV., in January, 1400. The Duchess in the play is therefore a purely imaginary character.

Thomas Mowbray, Duke of Norfolk, as Earl of Nottingham had been one of the original Lords Appellant, but in 1397 he had gone over to Richard's inter-

est in a manner which gave rise to the darkest reports. He was said to have informed against his father-in-law, the Earl of Arundel, whom he certainly guarded to the scaffold, and from whose property he was rewarded. Then as Governor of Calais he was custodian of the Duke of Gloucester when the latter came to his death, undoubtedly by murder. He was evidently an untrustworthy man, and probably both Richard and Bolingbroke were equally anxious to be rid of him. Bolingbroke's accusation, as given in Holinshed, may well have been true: it is likely enough that to his old ally and fellow turncoat Norfolk did speak in confidence "words sounding highly to the king's dishonour": and in Holinshed too Richard bases his heavy sentence solely on that ground. Shakespeare ignores this, and sets forth only certain subordinate charges, evidently an afterthought of Bolingbroke's, to which Norfolk pleads guilty, with extenuating circumstances, in a tone which wins the audience. This impression is confirmed by the slight but noticeable difference between the conventional defiances of the two champions, and again between the speeches in which they receive their sentences: there is more of the accent of sincerity and nobility in Norfolk's. The dramatic effect of this is to throw Bolingbroke's cunning into relief and show Richard as recklessly sacrificing one who was at any rate his friend against the intriguer. But Norfolk cannot be said to have any individuality of his own apart from this. In Act IV, Scene 2, he is correctly reported as having died in Venice in 1399.

Henry, Earl of Northumberland, was the first of the Percy family to bear that title: it was conferred on him in 1377 at Richard's coronation, when he was also made Earl Marshal, having previously been "Marshal of England." He was throughout the period of the play Richard's most violent and unscrupulous opponent: captured him by treachery and perjury, and moved in Parliament after his deposition that he should be removed from the "large prison" originally ordained for him and sent to Pontefract, where he was to be allowed to communicate with no one living. His self-seeking and turbulent character was soon exhibited against Henry IV, who had made him Lord High Constable, but disappointed his greed by insisting on the surrender of certain prisoners.

The rest of Northumberland's life was spent in rebellion. His troops were defeated in 1403 at Shrewsbury, where his son Hotspur was killed: he himself, after a second attempt in 1405, fled to Scotland, leaving all his associates to suffer on the scaffold, and in 1408 he was finally defeated and killed at Bramham Moor. Shakespeare has failed to draw the true picture of this old wolf, but he has rightly made him Richard's chief tormentor in the deposition scene.

Henry Percy (Hotspur), Northumberland's eldest son, inherited his domineering temperament, but perhaps with some more chivalrous qualities. He was a fighting man of great repute, and a Knight of the Garter. It is a curious and perhaps significant fact, that although it does not appear that he was ever

summoned to Parliament, yet on October 23, 1399, on the question relating to the same custody of the late king (Richard II.), he was present there and voted among the "Seigneurs demandez et assentuz sur la question sus-dite." In Act II, Scene 3, he is made to speak of himself as "tender, raw, and young" in service, and the same liberty is repeated in *Henry IV.*, Part I, where he is represented as of equal age with Prince Hal, who was then fifteen. The historical Hotspur was two years older than Bolingbroke and twenty-two years older than his son. He was killed in the final *mêlée* at Shrewsbury.

The Bishop of Carlisle in 1399 was "Thomas Merkes, *alias* of Newmarket, *alias* Sumestre." He was first a Benedictine monk of Westminster, and had only held the see two years. His stoutness in maintaining Richard's cause is recorded by Holinshed and the other chroniclers; Shakespeare has brought it out in two magnificent speeches, but has not otherwise individualised him. He was deprived in 1399 (his successor was appointed on November 15), pardoned and released from the custody of the Abbot of Westminster in November, 1400, then instituted to the Vicarage of Sturminster, and 1404 presented by the Abbot to the Rectory of Todenham, where he probably lived till the end of 1409.

The Abbot of Westminster was William of Colchester. He died, not as Holinshed states, in 1400, but in 1420. It is extremely improbable that "the grand conspirator" who could plan high treason from the very first hour of Henry's triumph would die from

"clog of conscience and sour melancholy." Shakespeare has probably here transferred to the Abbot, with some verbal alteration, Holinshed's (equally unfounded) statement about Carlisle; namely, that "he died shortly after, more through feare than force of sicknesse, as some have written." In so doing he did not observe his own inconsistency.

The Queen was Richard's second wife, Isabella, eldest daughter of Charles VI. of France. She was born in 1388, and was married to Richard in 1396, being then under eight years old: she was therefore between eleven and twelve at the date of the events in the play. As her age is mentioned by Holinshed it is probable that Shakespeare deliberately made her a woman instead of a child, and represented her marriage as a real one, in order to complete the dramatic situation.

There are thirteen other persons in the play, but their historical record, however interesting to the antiquary, is of no importance to the student of drama. They are mostly supernumeraries and even the more distinguished of them were simply taken by Shakespeare as he found them. They formed no part of his problem and bear no mark of his hand.

VIII

JOHN MILTON

It may be thought that enough has been written upon Milton, that the impulse to add one more stone to the immense cairn of criticism which has been piled up during these last two centuries could only spring from self-conceit or ignorance. Such an objection would, I think, be removed by a reconsideration of the nature of criticism and of poetry itself. A piece of criticism may be a work of art; it may have in a high degree the power of expressing the feeling of the writer and communicating it to those who read; in that case it will possess an independent and possibly a lasting value. But as a verdict or judgment it can have no finality; criticism, in this sense, is for an age, not for all time. It has been said that every generation needs its own translation of Homer, and the reason is evident. The language of our ancestors, even of our less remote ancestors, is for all finer purposes a foreign language to us, and to view the world of Homer in such a medium would be to see it through two veils instead of one. Still more necessary is it that *criticism* should speak to us in our own tongue; so only can we arrive at our own understanding of the poets and make our own estimate of them. More-

over, we cannot rely here on tradition: what we seek in poetry is not to be got at second-hand or by inheritance—if we cannot hear with our own ears, it matters little what our fathers have declared unto us. Milton, a name to resound for ages, may be an item in the index of history or the roll of national pride, but if he is only a name, if his greatness is only to be taken on trust, he is no longer part of our poetical life.

We may go further: we may say that not only does the feeling, the taste, the point of view of one generation differ inevitably from that of another, but the very subjects of criticism are themselves changed with the passing of time. The poem which we read to-day may no longer be the same in substance as that which our predecessors read under the same title, for we do not inhabit the same world with them. What to them were facts, solid facts of earth, are to us fairy-tales; and many of our facts would have been fairy-tales to them. It was possible for Addison to remark that *Paradise Lost*, by the nature of its subject, has the advantage of every other poem in being universally and perpetually interesting; because, he says, "all mankind will through all ages bear the same relation to Adam and to Eve, and must partake of that good and evil which extend to themselves." It was possible, less than forty years ago, for this saying still to be quoted with approval. But to a generation which does not number Adam and Eve among its ancestors, or derive from their story any of its ideas of good and evil, the poem, if it is to be interesting,

must have some interest more deserving of the epithet "perpetual." For us the very word itself is no longer the right word; the immortality of great poetry is not an unbroken, constant, changeless state of being. It is rather a life incessantly renewed, a spirit incessantly revealed under fresh aspects, a dawn which can never be twice the same because it brings every day new fire to a new world of human feeling.

We may be said, then, to be looking to-day upon a Milton whom no one has yet seen, and we must be careful to look with clear eyes and unspoiled sensibility. Moreover, we must limit the range of our inquiry. The poems before us are no doubt part of our national inheritance; they are works of world-wide fame; they derive their form from great literary ancestors like Homer, Euripides, and Virgil, and some of their minor features from more recent ones, such as Spenser, Shakespeare, and Cowley: they occupy an important place in the evolution of English verse; they contain a great argument or theological system, displayed with infinite skill of craftsmanship, and they illustrate a code of morals at once rigid and rebellious. Finally, they are a mass of learning and information, and upon them has been heaped up a still greater mass of the same, whether in the shape of controversy, commentary, or word by word annotation. But all these aspects are merely incidental, and with them we have very little concern. They may call for a moment's attention now and again, when we cannot avoid seeing them from the direct line of our search. The search itself has but one

object—to discover John Milton in his poetry, to share with him the native land of his spirit, and to follow him into the vast solitude which he created for his own torment. The scene we are to witness is unsurpassed for beauty and for sadness: it is the deepest tragedy in the Book of the Poets—the tragedy of a lost Paradise.

It has been held by some, and denied by others, that a man's poetical work should be or could be independent of the events of his life. Commonly enough, while a poet is still living the public know little of him beyond his books and what they do know is apt to seem irrelevant or incomplete. The ascertainable facts are not all recorded in the poems —it was difficult to trace a connection between Keats's study of surgery and the production of *Endymion*. On the other hand, the poetical record may exist and the fact remain concealed—no inquiry has yet determined what event in Byron's life was the cause of Manfred's remorse. We may, I think, solve the difficulty by giving a wider meaning to the word "event." It is certain that what makes the poet's life makes his poetry. An event is not necessarily something visible to the outside observer, nor even something definitely and immediately present to a man's own consciousness. The rise of an emotion may be as imperceptible as the rise of the tide. Yet the thing has happened: the change has passed upon the soul, has perhaps even left a mark upon the shore of time. In Milton's life there were no doubt events of both kinds, the visible and the invisible, but for the most

part the connection between the outward and the inner life is traceable with unusual clearness.

John Milton was born in Bread Street, Cheapside, on December 9th, 1608. His father, who was a prosperous scrivener, and a man of good family and education, was proud of him, and gave him as soon as possible every chance of overworking himself. From the age of twelve the boy read the classics regularly until midnight, to the lasting injury of his eyes. At fifteen he went to St. Paul's School; at sixteen to Christ's College, Cambridge, where he remained seven years in all. His intention throughout was to take Orders in the Church of England.

There can be no doubt that as a boy and as a young man he was both happy himself and the cause of happiness in others. His parents seem to have treated him with easy generosity and confidence; he was on good terms with his brother and sister; he was distinguished among his contemporaries for his talent and his personal beauty. But these are only favourable circumstances: of the happiness of his temperament there is positive evidence in his own hand. His Latin poems, for the obvious reason, too often escape attention. There is not much poetry in them, but there is information both valuable and entertaining. From the first of the Elegies, written to his friend Diodati when he was eighteen, we gather that he had been rusticated from the University for a time, and was neither sorry nor ashamed. He could not stand being flogged, and then the bare, treeless fields of Cambridge were so uncongenial to a poet. If

home was exile, then exile was what he preferred: he was thoroughly enjoying it. He was devoting himself to his reading; when he tired of that there was the theatre, on the joys of which he dwells enthusiastically, and the ladies. The ladies, troops of them! Oh! their bright eyes, their white necks, their brows, their wavy hair—the golden nets of love! The maids of Britain come first in fame—happy London to hold the beauty of the world within her walls!

Elegy VII, dated the following year, tells the story of his first love. He had summarily scorned Love and all his arrows: had, in fact, told him to go and shoot doves or sparrows. But one May morning, when the crowd of brilliant young goddesses were going to and fro between town and country, he too went out, and looked, and met their looks. One of them he marked as beautiful above the rest—she might have been Venus, or indeed Juno either. Cupid remembered his old score and shot a volley: madness such as he had never known entered the young man's heart, he burned inwardly with love, he was all fire. But she—the only woman in the world for him—she went away, and he never saw her again. Half of him went with her, half remained to grieve—if he could only see her beloved face just once more! He prayed to be cured, and yet not to be cured, of his madness: he discovered that there is something sweet in lover's woe. Meanwhile he neglected his work, till the University (no longer treeless) called him back and taught him better.

Elegy VI is some months later. Diodati had

written in December, giving the winter festivities as his excuse for sending inferior verses. Milton replies with a long and learned but decidedly spirited argument: there is no ground, he says, for supposing festivity, and especially drinking, to be unfavourable to poetry. Where there is wine, music, and dancing, there you will find Phœbus slipping quietly in—into your heart, into the ladies' eyes and the musicians' fingers. That is, for the elegiac poet: the martial or heroic must be abstemious—Homer made a slender meal and drank water. Then in ten lines of surpassing interest Milton tells his friend what *he* is doing with his Christmas. He has been writing the Ode on the morning of Christ's Nativity. His account of the poem he compresses into three couplets, speaking of the Son of Heaven's eternal King, our great redemption and perpetual peace, of majesty laid aside and the Infant God wailing in a rude manger, of the spangled host and the Angel quire, and of the old-world gods driven suddenly from their temples dim. This Ode, he says, was his birthday gift, offered at the first dawn of light:

> See how from far upon the eastern road
> The star-led wisards haste with odours sweet;
> O run, prevent them with thy humble ode,
> And lay it lowly at his blessed feet;
> Have thou the honour first thy Lord to greet,
> And join thy voice unto the Angel quire,
> From out his secret altar touch'd with hallow'd fire.

The English stanza is, of course, incomparable, if only for the intensity of the imagination by which

the poet's own eagerness makes the Wise Men his contemporaries and so brings the whole story into the living present. But those brief and formal Latin verses have also something of their own: if translated into prose and cast in the more ordinary form of a letter, they would still be remarkable for their unconscious simplicity. They show that the piety of Milton's youth, however uninquiring, and his imagination, however unearthly, are not in any way affected or self-conscious or sentimental; they can be uttered in high sounding verse or in a familiar epistle to a friend, with equal sincerity. And I think this much may be said of nearly all Milton's early work, whether in Latin or English: it is not for the most part very good poetry, because it has little experience behind it, but what it does express is the real man, the Milton of that period. It shows us clearly enough a gentle and sociable youth, a lover of music, gaiety, women, books, plays, and country pleasures: at the same time studious, religious, and high-minded: a temperament exceptionally happy, but not in any other way extraordinary. His powers do not seem to promise either deep philosophy or poetical innovation—his creed and his style are both conventional, accepted uncritically from the hands of the past. But if this is true of most of these poems, there is one of which it is not true, not the whole truth. Even now, at twenty-one, in this same Ode on the Nativity, Milton shows himself to be possessed of that gift of natural magic which takes common words, and suddenly in some way beyond explanation makes of them a strange

and memorable picture, a strange and haunting melody, an irradiation, an enchantment. Sometimes the effect seems to be produced by an almost freakish beauty of imagination, as where "the sun in bed, curtain'd with cloudy red, Pillows his chin upon an orient wave. . . . And the yellow-skirted Fayes Fly after the night-steeds, leaving their moon-loved maze," or where the Star hangs fixed over Bethlehem, "And all about the courtly stable Bright-harnessed Angels sit in order serviceable"—a picture only to be paralleled by the work of Botticelli or Fra Angelico. Sometimes it seems to be a beauty of sound:

> The lonely mountains o'er,
> And the resounding shore,
> A voice of weeping heard and loud lament;
> From haunted spring, and dale
> Edged with poplar pale
> The parting genius is with sighing sent.

But it is not only image or sound, nor is it the thought that moves us here, for a kind of intoxication of delight is produced even before the sense can penetrate the consciousness: it is a power inexplicably hidden in the words themselves and called forth by their arrangement in a magical order. I say hidden, because the effect often appears to be quite independent of any richness in the words if taken singly or apart from their context. The barest and simplest of all these stanzas is one of the most beautiful:

> The shepherds on the lawn,
> Or e'er the point of dawn,

Sat simply chatting in a rustic row;
Full little thought they then
That the mighty Pan
Was kindly come to live with them below;
Perhaps their loves, or else their sheep,
Was all that did their silly thoughts so busy keep.

What is it that is here hidden in the words? What can it be but the personal touch of the poet himself, the peculiar voice or vision or gesture which is his own and by which he communicates to us the exultation, the solemnity, the tenderness of his spirit? For those to whom this means nothing, for those who judge by an external standard, the poem may be full of faults. Johnson deals severely with all Milton's early poems, including this ode. "They have," he says, "a cast original and unborrowed. But their peculiarity is not excellence: if they differ from verses of others, they differ for the worse, for they are too often distinguished by repulsive harshness: the combinations of words are new, but they are not pleasing." Probably to modern lovers of poetry this criticism will seem to need no refutation: it will be enough to record that what pleased Milton's ear was harsh to Johnson's, and that in the latter's opinion Milton's poetry would have been better if it had been less Miltonic and more in accord with the Johnsonian ideal. Elsewhere Johnson does admit, incidentally, that a poem has something besides form: it contains "sentiments." But sentiments are apparently almost extraneous things; as with opinions, a man may have them or not have them, feel them or not feel them; the idea that they

are a living and inseparable part of the man, the idea that a poem is the expression of the poet's intuition, is continually ignored or negatived in Johnson's criticism, favourable or unfavourable. Of *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso,* poems of the period immediately following, he says that "opinion is uniform; every man that reads them reads them with pleasure." But for him their merit lies first in the author's design, which is "to show how among the successive variety of appearances, every disposition of mind takes hold on those by which it may be gratified"; and, secondly, in the skill with which "the images are properly selected and nicely distinguished." If we were looking for "merit," we might perhaps agree with this; if we ask rather what is the value of these poems for us, we shall be more likely to find it in their revelation of Milton's personality and in the direct contact by which they enable us to share the activity of his spirit, in two contrasted moods, the sanguine and the reflective. These two moods are not, as Johnson thought, moods belonging to two different characters, moods of "the cheerful man" and "the pensive man"; they are two different sides of the same man, and that man is first John Milton and afterwards every one of us. Few will find it easy to decide which of the two poems they prefer. *L'Allegro,* I think, has the happier beginning, and its landscape has the everlasting freshness of morning:

> To hear the lark begin his flight,
> And singing startle the dull night, . . .

While the cock with lively din
Scatters the rear of darkness thin,
And to the stack, or the barn door,
Stoutly struts his dames before:
Oft list'ning how the hounds and horn
Cheerly rouse the slumb'ring morn,
From the side of some hoar hill,
Through the high wood echoing shrill:
Some time walking, not unseen,
By hedge-row elms, on hillocks green,
Right against the eastern gate,
Where the great sun begins his state,
Rob'd in flames, and amber light,
The clouds in thousand liveries dight;
While the ploughman near at hand
Whistles o'er the furrow'd land,
And the milkmaid singeth blithe,
And the mower whets his scythe,
And every shepherd tells his tale
Under the hawthorn in the dale.

If I dared to be as rash as Addison, I would say that this poem has for Englishmen the advantage of all others in being universally and perpetually interesting; for we shall through all ages bear the same relation to the sights and sounds and actions which make up the life it pictures and cause the pleasure it expresses.

There are other lines in *L'Allegro* significant for our present purpose—those which speak of the fairies and goblins of rustic folklore, or of scenes of chivalry,

Where throngs of knights and barons bold
In weeds of peace high triumphs hold,
With store of ladies, whose bright eyes
Rain influence, and judge the prize——

Or again of the joys of weddings and masks and pageants, and finally of the well-trod stage of Comedy, and of music and song. From *Il Penseroso* it appears that Milton's taste in modern tragedy was more fastidious; but he again makes music the climax of his pleasures. This time it is religious music, in its most romantic and ceremonial setting:

> But let my due feet never fail
> To walk the studious cloisters pale,
> And love the high-embowèd roof,
> With antic pillars massy proof,
> And storied windows richly dight,
> Cast a dim religious light:
> There let the pealing organ blow,
> To the full-voic'd quire below,
> In service high, and anthems clear,
> As may with sweetness, through mine ear,
> Dissolve me into ecstasies,
> And bring all heav'n before mine eyes.

"All heav'n" is a vague expression, perhaps too vague for such poetry, but it could not be more significant. For Milton, in these years of his happiness, his ears and eyes were the gateways of heaven; religion was an ecstasy and not an argument. The poem is all of a piece; its delights are æsthetic and scarcely intellectual at all, except under an æsthetic aspect. The Cherub Contemplation is only named to be set aside for the nightingale or the moonlit garden: and if the poet's "Lamp at midnight hour Be seen in some high lonely tower," it is not for the sake of science or scientific philosophy, but that he may speculate with romantic curiosity

What worlds or what vast regions hold
The immortal mind that hath forsook
Her mansion in this fleshly nook.

So with Literature—the poetry of the Greeks, the poetry of the *Canterbury Tales* and the *Faerie Queen* —their value is for Milton a subjective value; they exist and are enumerated as pleasures in a list where they stand next to the delights of a summer noon under archèd walks of twilight groves and shadows brown, or in a covert by the brookside, with mysterious dreams and fairy music; or the joys of a spring dawn whether rising in wind and cloud,

Or usher'd with a shower still,
When the gust hath blown his fill,
Ending on the rustling leaves,
With minute drops from off the eaves.

In a word, the mood of *Il Penseroso* is no less perfectly sensuous than that of *L'Allegro.*

These two poems are undated, and were not published till 1645, but it is generally agreed that they are the earliest written by Milton after he left Cambridge in 1632. He was now living at Horton, in Buckinghamshire, where his father had bought a property. His intention to take Orders had not yet been abandoned; his delay he explained to a reproachful friend by saying that he was "not taking thought of being late, so it gave advantage to be more fit." In the meantime, he was writing poetry and keeping good company. The little mask *Arcades,* written for

the family of his neighbour, the Dowager Countess of Derby, was followed by the much more elaborate one now called by the name of *Comus*. This was presented at the Michaelmas festivities at Ludlow Castle in 1634, before the President of Wales, John Earl of Bridgewater, who had married Lady Derby's daughter. The plot was founded upon a forest adventure of Lord Bridgewater's children, and the piece was acted by them. These circumstances, and the influence of Edmund Spenser, are sufficient to account for the conventional tone of its morality, which is ingenuously bald and confiding. But the best of the argument is on the other side; many among the noble audience, and many more among the Cavaliers of a later day, must have applauded from their hearts those two speeches of the Enchanter, in which he inveighs against the foolishness of men who praise "the lean and sallow Abstinence":

> Therefore did Nature pour her bounties forth
> With such a full and unwithdrawing hand,
> Covering the earth with odours, fruits, and flocks,
> Thronging the seas with spawn innumerable,
> But all to please and sate the curious taste?
> And set to work millions of spinning worms,
> That in their green shops weave the smooth-hair'd silk
> To deck her sons; and that no corner might
> Be vacant of her plenty, in her own loins
> She hutch'd th' all-worshipped ore, and precious gems,
> To store her children with; if all the world
> Should in a pet of temp'rance feed on pulse,
> Drink the clear stream, and nothing wear but frieze,
> Th' All-giver would be unthank'd, would be unpraised,

Not half his riches known, and yet despis'd;
And we should serve him as a grudging master,
As a penurious niggard of his wealth;
And live like Nature's bastards, not her sons.

To argue that this is not sincere, or that its sincerity is merely dramatic, that it is only introduced as a foil to the moralistic doctrine of the piece, would be to ignore the literary and social history of the time. *Comus* was the most distinguished product of an anti-Puritan reaction. It was one of a number of Masks put forth in the more cultivated society of the day by way of counterblast to Prynne's *Histriomastix,* an incoherent but very vituperative pamphlet published in the previous year against the amusements of the upper classes, such as music, cards, hunting, maypoles, Christmas decorations, and, above all, against the stage. Milton when he wrote *Comus* was true to his past, not to his future; his sincerity was engaged on the side of liberal manners. The doctrine of the magical power of chastity against ruffians and enchanters was a high-flown commonplace borrowed from the Elizabethans, and was no doubt considered by the Bridgewaters as very suitable for their young people to represent. But their real feeling, the feeling of all civilised societies about the full use of earth's natural resources, was no doubt Milton's feeling also, uttered by him with more complete conviction and received by them with more genuine applause.

I cannot leave *Comus* without remarking that the lyrics and lyrical passages contained in it show once

more that magical quality with which Milton had the power of endowing words:

> Braid your locks with rosy twine,
> Dropping odours, dropping wine,
> Rigour now is gone to bed,
> And Advice with scrupulous head,
> Strict Age, and sour Severity,
> With their grave saws in slumber lie.
> We that are of purer fire,
> Imitate the starry quire. . . .
> Who in their nightly watchful spheres
> Lead in swift round the months and years.
> The sounds and seas with all their finny drove
> Now to the moon in wavering morrice move:
> And on the tawny sands and shelves
> Trip the pert fairies and the dapper elves.

Was ever witchery more irresistible? It needed all Milton's own enchantments to undo it; no, even he could not undo it, he could only match it with an invocation so lovely that under it all senses lose their reality, except that unnamed inward sense by which the spirit is reached more quickly than the brain:

> Sabrina fair,
> Listen where thou are sitting
> Under the glassy, cool, translucent wave,
> In twisted braids of lilies knitting
> The loose train of thy amber-dropping hair;
> Listen for dear honour's sake,
> Goddess of the silver lake,
> Listen and save.

It is difficult to understand how a poet gifted with such a power as this could be content to forgo its use

for long periods of time. Yet between *Comus* and *Lycidas* three silent years passed. No conjecture can shorten this interval, because the event which called forth the *Monody*—the death of Milton's fellow-student, Edward King, of Christ's—did not occur until 1637. But the power when it does reappear is as inexplicable as ever, and more sustained; *Lycidas* is a spell woven almost entirely of magical words. It is a poem most difficult to quote from without quoting it all: there are here no hesitations, no flatnesses—every strophe will have its ardent partisans. But it is better to read than to praise it: for the passion for beauty and the passion for right which burn in it need no description to a lover of poetry, while to a prosaic mind they would be ineffective in any case. Among the most beautiful and typical passages is this:

> Together both, ere the high lawns appear'd
> Under the opening eyelids of the morn,
> We drove a-field, and both together heard
> What time the gray-fly winds her sultry horn,
> Batt'ning our flocks with the fresh dews of night.

Yet these are the very first lines selected by Johnson for censure. "We know," he says, "that they never drove a-field, and that they had no flocks to batten." It is very true: in the Johnsonian world they did not, and the real Miltonic world Johnson could not enter. If he had reached it in some impossible moment when his common sense was off guard, he would have found there, without "disgust" and

even without surprise, a transfiguration of life which includes in one and the same vision two young Cambridge men and their tutor, rough Satyrs and Fauns with cloven heel, Nymphs, Druids, Bacchanals, Furies, the pure eyes and perfect witness of all-judging Jove, fountain Arethuse, the herald of the sea, Camus, revered sire, the pilot of the Galilean lake, the great vision of the guarded Mount, and the Sicilian Muse calling to the vales for the flowers that had been first gathered by Ophelia and by Perdita:

> Bring the rathe primrose that forsaken dies,
> The tufted crow-toe, and pale jessamine,
> The white pink, and the pansy freak'd with jet,
> The glowing violet,
> The musk-rose, and the well-attir'd woodbine,
> With cowslips wan that hang the pensive head,
> And every flower that sad embroidery wears:
> Bid amaranthus all his beauty shed,
> And daffadillies fill their cups with tears,
> To strow the laureate herse where Lycid lies.

For us who are trying, with at any rate more goodwill than Johnson, to follow and find Milton in his own world, there is one note in Lycidas which we have never caught before. The dread voice that for a moment shrunk the streams is the voice of no mitred saint, but of an indignant patriot. Even in his Sicilian dreamland Milton could not but hear and answer the trumpets that in the world below were already calling to war. There is nothing to wonder at in this: to an impartial spectator looking back from this distance of time it is only astonishing that Laud's

methods should have failed to anger any even of those who shared the tenets of his faith. Milton, as I think his poems have told us unmistakably, was no Puritan born: his sense of beauty and his religious instinct were naturally at one; his practice and his whole training had been in the direct line of conformity. What is really astonishing here is not that he took the side of the Puritans, but that in so doing he became a new man, a contentious, bitter, and unrestrained partisan; his whole nature was overturned as by a revolution. We are tempted to read back the Milton of 1667 into the Milton of 1637; but we do it in defiance of the evidence. The hard, argumentative, and revengeful character of the older man seems to have had no root in the happy temperament of the youth: what has happened, if we examine it closely, resembles a chemical reaction rather than a process of organic development.[1]

Let us trace very briefly the course of Milton's life from the year of *Lycidas* to the year of *Paradise Lost*. In 1638 his mother died, and he left home for a foreign tour. In fifteen months he visited Paris, Florence, Siena, Rome, Naples, Rome and Florence

[1] One of the chemical elements was no doubt the anti-Romanism early instilled into Milton by his father. In the Latin Ode on the Fifth of November (written before he was eighteen) this is expressed fully, but conventionally, and without any of the savage contempt that long afterwards invented the Paradise of Fools. The poem has a greater interest as containing the first sketch of the fallen Archangel, *æthereo vagus Exul Olympo:*

> So far he spoke: at last on pitchy vans
> He swims the liquid air: whither he flies
> Foul winds before him run, clouds gather dense,
> And frequent thunders flash.

again, Lucca, Venice, and Geneva. He was received with distinction by doctors, poets, noblemen, and Cardinals, in spite of his not very reticent Protestantism; he talked with Grotius and Galileo; he made a considerable collection of books, and wrote love sonnets to a beautiful Roman singer. The political crisis at home is given as the cause of his return. But in the following year—1640—he began to earn his living by taking pupils at a house in Aldersgate Street, and it is certain that his ambition at this time was poetical—he intended to write a great national epic upon the story of King Arthur and the Round Table. By the following year this dream had faded into the light of common day. In 1641 he published the tract on Reformation, a fierce attack on Bishops and ceremonies, of which the concluding words are a prophecy that his opponents, "after a shameful end in this life (which God grant them), shall be thrown down eternally into the darkest and deepest gulf of Hell, where under the despiteful control, the triumph and spurn of all the other Damned, that in the anguish of their torture shall have no other ease than to exercise a raving and bestial tyranny over them as their Slaves and Negroes, they shall remain in that plight for ever, the basest, the lower-most, the most dejected, most underfoot and down-trodden Vassals of Perdition." Four other tracts followed closely upon this: two of them in defence of the anti-Prelatical writers known collectively as Smectymnuus. These pamphlets are interesting for their autobiographical details, but their tone is quarrelsome, coarse, and egotistic.

In 1642 the Civil War broke out, and went for some time in favour of the King. At Whitsuntide, 1643, just before the tide turned, Milton married Mary Powell, the daughter of an Oxfordshire Cavalier and country gentleman. A month afterwards she went to her relations on the pretext of a visit, and refused to return to her husband. Milton at once wrote four tracts on Divorce: three of them are sober enough in language, though extreme in doctrine, but the fourth, being for the chastisement of a writer who had dared to answer him, is full of abuse that would disgrace a schoolboy. His opponent's arguments are "filth and venom," when they are not something worse; the last of them is "a concluding taste of his Jabberment in law, the flashiest and fustiest that ever corrupted in such an unswill'd Hogshead."

In 1645 Milton published a collection of his poems and the famous *Areopagitica; a Speech for the Liberty of Unlicens'd Printing.* In the same year he was reconciled to his wife. In 1647 he revolted against the Presbyterians, and afterwards wrote in support of the Independents. After the King's execution in 1649 he published four more tracts, the first of which was an answer to the *Eikon Basilike,* and the last *A Defence of the People of England,* in which he overwhelms his adversary Salmasius with the last extremity of discourteous and obscene contempt. It was for this service that the Parliament gave him a present of £1000, as well as the post of Latin Secretary; but the effort finally destroyed his sight. In

1655 he prepared himself to write *Paradise Lost,* and in 1657 he began it.

Of this famous poem almost everyone is ready to give an orthodox opinion, but very few are willing to speak or even to think of it with candour. In my own youth I read it with pleasure—a pleasure due partly to the passages of poetry in it, partly to the story, but more largely I think to the relation of its form and style to the masterpieces of antiquity. Mark Pattison, who felt the same kind of satisfaction in a higher degree, spoke of it as "one of the rewards of scholarship." As a work of art I have in later years studied the poem more seriously; at the present moment I admire it as sincerely as it can be admired on this side idolatry—that is, without bias from tradition, from scholastic associations, or from theological sympathies. Its many beauties, the greatness of the personality which is expressed in it, and the immense range of the powers employed, make it a fit subject for a long and detailed examination. But for this there is no room in a study where it is regarded simply as a manifestation of Milton's spirit, an important and prolonged, but still a single, manifestation. A very brief note will be sufficient here if it indicates the nature of the criticism to be applied by any lover of poetry who may be persuaded to read this poem at leisure.

Two views have been held of the writing of *Paradise Lost:* it is to be feared that the common one is also the one which must be attributed to Milton. He had for years prepared himself with a high intention

of dedicating his powers to his country's service; he relied, too, on inspiration from "that Eternal Spirit who can enrich with all utterance and knowledge, and sends out his Seraphim with the hallow'd fire of his altar, to touch and purify the lips of whom he pleases." But there must be other resources too: among them "industrious and select reading" and "Steddy Observation." We shall probably do him no injustice if we understand him to have held, like most of his countrymen since, that his poem is a great piece of work external to himself, performed by the application of his intellect, with devotion, with skill, and with taste. We would certainly have disagreed with the modern view, the scientific view, that it is the expression of the whole man's spiritual activity, conscious and intellectual, unconscious and æsthetic, and that its artistic value arises not from the first but the second of these activities.

Johnson, of course, was at one with Milton here. "Epick poetry," he says, "undertakes to teach the most important truths by the most pleasing precepts." He goes on to enumerate the faculties necessary, and the processes in which they must be employed: dramatic energy, skill in diversification, morality, policy, physiology, delicacy of language, metrical moderation, and so forth. In all of these he shows that Milton excelled. Moreover, "the substance of the narrative is truth." And how does he sum up the result? "*Paradise Lost* is one of the books which the reader admires and lays down, and forgets to take up again.

None ever wished it longer than it is. Its perusal is a duty rather than a pleasure."

I believe that this is, openly or secretly, the feeling of ninety-nine out of a hundred educated people to-day. It is the natural consequence of a false æsthetic: it is the feeling expressed in the presence of all great art by the weary, dutiful, unintelligent formula, "Ah! very fine." It is time, I think, for the comfort of the large company of martyrs to say frankly that *Paradise Lost* is not "very fine" in the sense in which they suppose it to be so. Its greatness does not lie in its greatness: looked at from Johnson's point of view, from Milton's own point of view, it is a colossal failure. Sir Walter Raleigh, the most acute as well as the wittiest of modern critics, has perfectly exhibited its intellectual absurdities, its essentially political purpose, and its entire lack of religion. He is equally convincing when he praises it for its poetry and its interest as a revelation of personality. But when he denies that the badness of the plot and machinery is the main cause of its failure to hold the ordinary reader, I think that he is out of touch with modern poetical feeling. We ask of the poet to-day that he shall make for us a new world out of the fragments of earth; we cannot accept from him a sham world peopled with phantoms from Nowhere. There are but two or three great epics known to us, and *Paradise Lost* is not among them. William Morris in his *Sagas,* like Homer in his *Iliad,* has so drawn human life that we see it to be greater than we knew; Milton

has so drawn angelic life that we find it more absurd than we could have imagined it.

But the interest and the beauty are there if we will only look for them. In those ten years when the poet sat in darkness dictating his laborious and indefensible argument, a spirit that he never thought of sat inseparably with him and wrote poetry into all his prosing. Much of it was fierce, tragic stuff—drawn from memories, hardly conscious, of the days of wedded misery, the days of bitter oppression, the days of pride and contention and cursing. Even in this there was beauty, the beauty of passion and courage beating their naked hands against the strongholds of evil, and there was always the perfection of self-expression. But there is also again and again an echo of the former magic, a tone still vibrating with the happiness of the youth that died so quickly after Lycidas:

> Now came still Evening on, and Twilight gray
> Had in her sober livery all things clad:
> Silence accompanied: for beast and bird
> They to their grassy couch, these to their nests,
> Were slunk, all but the wakeful nightingale;
> She all night long her amorous descant sung;
> Silence was pleas'd: now glowed the firmament
> With living sapphires; Hesperus that led
> The starry host rode brightest, till the moon,
> Rising in clouded majesty, at length
> Apparent queen unvail'd her peerless light,
> And o'er the dark her silver mantle threw.

It would be comforting to end with this, but it would be falsifying Milton's record. He lived to see

the Restoration, and to revolt against the manners of a nation escaping not too decorously from unnatural repression. He lived to write a poem greater and more perfect than *Paradise Lost.* In *Samson Agonistes* he surveyed his own life: with none of the old careless magic, and with more bitterness than ever, but also with a far loftier and more unfaltering dignity, he pictured the death of the blind giant, betrayed by his own wife, mocked and degraded by his Philistine enemies, enduring to the last for the sake of dominance and revenge. The hot blood of fierce personal passion runs through this play as it runs through no other. The pain is incomparable, because there is for us a tragedy beyond the tragedy. The Chorus find in Samson's vindictive end nothing but peace and consolation: a peace and consolation which Milton never found himself, and which we cannot but see to be the most hopeless and least worthy of all aspirations. Then comes the still more painful recollection that this doctrine of the supreme consolation of revenge is the last word not only of a barbarian from the Book of Judges, but of the young and beloved shepherd who once sang to the oaks and rills,

> While the still morn went out with sandals gray.

IX

BRITISH BALLADS

When we speak of ballads we include under that one title a number of poems of half a dozen different kinds produced during the earlier periods of our literary history, some in Scotland, some in England, and some upon the Border. These poems are rightly grouped together; they are all old, they are all anonymous, and, however they may differ, they all have in common a peculiar quality, not easy to define offhand, but not in the least difficult to recognise. To some this quality is very attractive; others have no taste for it—the division is as sharp as that between those who love music and those who classify it as a useless kind of noise. I am not sure that it is not even more fundamental. Certainly the appetite for ballads and the power of getting sustenance from them are generally developed in very early life, and a love of other kinds of poetry does not always follow in later years. Sir Walter Scott found the ballads in boyhood, and never left them for any other mood. "I remember well," he says, "the spot where I read those volumes—Percy's *Reliques*—for the first time. It was beneath a large platanus tree in the ruins of what had been intended for an old-fashioned arbour

in the garden. The summer day sped on so fast that, notwithstanding the sharp appetite of thirteen, I forgot the hour of dinner, was sought for with anxiety, and was found still entranced in my intellectual banquet."

Sir Walter is, of course, the extreme instance, but in this one point he is probably typical: he loved ballads in youth and he loved them by nature. The discovery which he made at thirteen can seldom be made by anyone at a later age, simply because we have ballads always with us; we cannot pass many years without at least making their acquaintance, for they are represented in every collection of poems for the young, whether in school or out of school. No doubt the choice offered is generally a rather restricted one; these poems are, many of them, stark primitive stuff; they belong to the dangerous region, which we think it better for our children to enter unguided and when we are not present. But in this respect the times have imperceptibly become easier: the boy of fifty years ago had to subsist on a bare dozen ballads gleaned from *Nightingale Valley* and other mixed anthologies; the boy of to-day will probably be given, if he asks for it, the *Oxford Book of Ballads,* with a well-gathered harvest of a hundred and seventy-six.

These are, I think, enough for anyone. A much smaller volume would contain all the really popular ones, for those who love ballads generally make the same choice within certain limits. If a hundred of us were cast away upon a desert island, and set

to work to reconstruct from our joint memories a book of favourite ballads, the total number recoverable would be perhaps a dozen, certainly not more than twenty. Of the rest nothing would survive but a few skeleton plots and a handful of striking phrases. Among the best remembered would be *The Milldams of Binnorie* and *Sir Patrick Spens* and *The Douglas Tragedy* and *Lord Randal* and *Childe Maurice;* those, at any rate, are the five names which came first to Professor Ker's mind in answer to the question, "What is a Ballad?" and Professor Ker is not only a critic, but a Borderer. To these five someone else would certainly add *Thomas the Rhymer* and *Clerk Saunders* and *The Wife of Usher's Well* and *The Twa Corbies* and *The Lykewake Dirge*—and then the difficulties would begin. Everyone would vote for *The Nutbrown Maid,* but no memory would be able to recall so long and complicated a piece; everyone would wish to include some of the outlaw ballads—*Jock o' the Side* or *A Geste of Robin Hood*—but these, too, would be beyond recovery, except in glittering fragments. The collection then, when made, would, I believe, turn out to be a small one; but whatever the number of favourites might be, it would not represent a diversity of feeling, for the pleasure derived from ballads is always the same in kind, if not in degree.

This is important, for it is a reflection which might occur to the most unlearned or uncritical of the castaways whom I have imagined, and it would show him that ballads have in them a peculiar quality—a "sin-

gularity,'' as Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch has called it —which marks them off clearly from the work of the known poets of any age. When that work is in question, to be a lover of poetry does not mean to be a lover of all poetry or of all poets. One man will carry Milton in his pocket, and not tolerate Swinburne upon his shelves; one will read all the philosophic poets and neglect all the romantic ones. Over our contemporaries the divisions are sometimes sharper and more subtly personal; many of us can remember the years when there was as keen a feud between the partisans of Tennyson and Browning as between the followers of Douglas and Percy. Those who lived habitually in the territory of the one could not visit the other even for an hour except for hostile purposes. No such antagonisms are known among the lovers of ballads; their choice may vary, but the reason of their choice is the same.

It is worth while, I think, to pursue this train of thought, to follow out the comparison of ballad poetry with other kinds of poetry, and to ascertain if possible what is the explanation of the peculiar attractiveness of which I have spoken. Let us begin in the most direct way by looking at the ballads themselves. Of the twelve already named the first is one of the oldest and most widely known. It has many names and many forms; it is known as *The Twa Sisters,* or as *The Milldams o' Binnorie,* or simply as *Bínnorie* or *Binórie;* the story is a good deal varied in the different versions, and there are at least four sets of

refrains in use. In modern collections the form chosen is usually that given in Scott's *Minstrelsy:*

There were twa sisters sat in a bower,
Binnorie, O Binnorie;
There came a knight to be their wooer
By the bonnie mill-dams o' Binnorie.

He courted the eldest with glove and ring,
Binnorie, O Binnorie;
But he loved the youngest abune a' thing,
By the bonnie mill-dams o' Binnorie.

The story is a very ancient one, found in Norway, Sweden, and Iceland as well as in Scotland; it is, in fact, a Scandinavian folk-tale. The elder sister is jealous, and pushes the youngest into the mill-dam. When the dead body is brought ashore a harper comes by, and

He 's ta'en three locks o' her yellow hair,
And wi' them strung his harp sae rare.

When he comes to her father's hall the harp plays of its own accord and calls for vengeance.

In this form, if not in this exact version, we have the original type of the ballad or *ballata*—a kind of primitive game of dance and song combined. A story was told in recitative by one performer, or perhaps by more than one, improvising the couplets in turn, while the dancers continually came in between with a line of their own, a chorus or refrain which was always the same. Another ballad of this primitive type is *Cospatrick,* also called *Gil Brenton:*

We were sisters, sisters seven,
Bowing down, bowing down,
The fairest women under heaven,
And aye the birks a-bowing.

Others are *Willy's Lady, Lady Isabel and the Elf-Knight, The Riddling Knight, Bonnie Annie, Earl Brand,* and the unique poem called *A Lyke-Wake Dirge:*

This ae night, this ae night,
Every night and alle,
Fire and fleet and candle light,
And Christe receive thy saule.

When thou from hence away art past,
Every night and alle,
To Whinny Muir thou comst at last,
And Christe receive thy saule.

After Whinny Muir is passed, the dead man comes to Brig o' Dread and then to Purgatory; the theology would seem to be a Pagan one converted to Christian use. This poem, it may be noted, was clearly never intended to be danced, but only to be sung; and it is probable that the same is true of all these ballads—they have preserved the primitive form, but as a choral and not as a choric form.

A further stage is reached when we come to *Lord Randal*—a dramatic dialogue between a mother and her son who has been poisoned by a lady whom he calls his true-love:

"O where hae ye been, Lord Randal, my son?
O where hae ye been, my handsome young man?"
"I hae been to the wildwood: mother, make my bed soon
For I'm weary wi' hunting and fain would lie down."

"Where got ye your dinner, Lord Randal, my son?
Where got ye your dinner, my handsome young man?"
"I dined wi' my true-love: mother, make my bed soon
For I'm weary wi' hunting and fain would lie down."

Here there is no longer a chorus; the piece must be sung in alternate couplets by two voices or by two sets of voices. But the monotonous charm of the older form is preserved to a great extent by the continual repetitions in the phrasing of the dialogue.

The next change is a more far-reaching one: the ballad is now adapted for one voice only by completely abandoning refrain or alternation, and telling the story in four-line stanzas of direct narrative:

There lived a wife at Usher's well,
And a wealthy wife was she:
She had three stout and stalwart sons,
And sent them o'er the sea.

The three sons are drowned, but a tremendous adjuration by their mother brings them home again in flesh and blood to spend one more night under her roof. At dawn they return to the grave:

Up then crew the red, red cock,
And up and crew the grey;
The oldest to the youngest said,
"'Tis time we were away."

Here all that remains of the original form is the four-line stanza and a very effective use of repetition and parallelism, which is, I think, a last survival of the primitive refrain. In *Childe Maurice,* a much longer story with a more developed plot, these devices are lavishly used and quite indispensable:

"Here is a glove, a glove," he says,
"Lined wi' the silver-gris;
Bid her to come to Silver Wood
To speak with Childe Maurice.

"And here is a ring, a ring," he says,
"A ring of the precious stone;
He prays her come to Silver Wood,
And ask the leave of none."

The little man John bears the message so well that he delivers it exactly in his master's own style:

"I come, I am come from Childe Maurice,
A message unto thee!
And Childe Maurice he greets you well,
And ever so well from me."

Even the lady catches the trick of it:

"Now peace, now peace, thou little man John,
For Christ's sake I pray thee!"
O, aye, she stampèd with her foot,
And winkèd with her e'e. . . .

It is evident that what has now been reached is a purely literary form—a form which has nothing to do with dancing, which does not need a chorus of voices, or a singing voice at all; a form adapted for plain recital, or even for the silence of the written

or printed word. And this form is so simple and effective that it can be used for the telling of many different kinds of stories. First came, no doubt, the old-world legends, the tales of elfin knights like Tam Lin, of sad ghosts returning from their graves like Clerk Saunders, or of knights or ladies brought to suspicion or death by cruel mistake, like Childe Maurice, or the bonny maid who was Cospatrick's bride twice over. Then the mediæval romances were quarried for similar material, and from the story of Ogier the Dane came the ballad of *Thomas the Rhymer,* who was carried away to live seven years with the Queen of Elfland. But Thomas the Rhymer was the name of a real man in a definite century, so the ballad treats the story as a historical romance, and gives "the Eildon Tree" as the scene of the meeting. The same process may be seen in the ballad of *Sir Patrick Spens,* which tells of a Scottish historical event not to be found in Scottish history. And this is true also of *Mary Hamilton,* a beautifully told story, which may have been founded in part on a real event, but which certainly re-arranges Queen Mary's Court with a good deal of freedom.

But even before the date of these last two, the ballad had claimed to recite history as what may be called "true romance." The Battle of Otterburn was a historical event, and a favourite subject on the Borders; further south the equally popular stories of Robin Hood were believed to be equally historical. On both these subjects there were probably older and better ballads than any which we now possess. The still

extant versions are remarkable for their length; and though they still keep to the old methods, they seldom achieve the finer touches of the old ballads. But they belong unmistakably to the ballad fellowship, and so do all those others, such as *Jock o' the Side, Hobbie Noble, Johnnie Armstrong, Jamie Telfer, Kinmont Willie,* and *Auld Maitland,* which tell plain tales of outlawry and Border feud; and with them must be remembered *The Dowie Dens of Yarrow* and the lament for *Helen of Kirkconnell,* and, above all, *The Nutbrown Maid,* though it is not really a ballad, nor even a tale of outlawry. But in its long and highly finished duologue it keeps the tradition of the noble "banished man," and portrays a still more noble woman whose virtues are those of the true ballad age.

In point of time it is hard to say exactly when the Robin Hood and Chevy Chase period ended; no doubt on the Border and in Scotland it lasted longer than in the south. But in point of style and matter there is no difficulty in drawing a line. If we speak of such a piece as *The Children in the Wood* or *The Lady turned Serving-man* as a ballad, we are no longer using the word in the same sense. These are domestic anecdotes in verse, and after them come a whole progeny of others, of which we can only say that the best are comically doleful and the worst dolefully comic:

> Lady Alice was sitting in her bower-window
> Mending her midnight quoif,
> And there she saw as fine a corpse
> As ever she saw in her life.

This is a mere travesty of the old ballads, and so is *The Loving Ballad of Lord Bateman,* a cockney version of Young Bekie:

O when she arrived at Lord Bateman's castle,
How boldly then she rang the bell!
"Who's there? Who's there?" cried the proud young porter,
"O come unto me pray quickly tell."

"O, is this here Lord Bateman's castle,
And is his lordship here within?"
"O yes, O yes," cried the proud young porter,
"He's just now taking his young bride in."

Instances might be multiplied; but these, I think, are enough to convince anyone. When we have reached his lordship's door-bell we have come a long way from our starting-point—so long a way that the bonnie mill-dams of Binnorie are completely out of sight.

Let us turn back and take up our inquiry again, with our favourite ballads freshly in mind. What is their singularity? To what is due the special pleasure which we all derive from them?—a pleasure which we do not get from Lord Bateman or Lady Alice. It is not enough to answer, "The old ballads are poetry and these are not." Poetry is a vague term, and I have found great and violent differences of opinion as to its scope. We need not reject such an answer, but we cannot be content with it unless we are told what is meant by poetry, and also to which of the many kinds of poetry the ballads belong; for there are distinctions in the pleasure derived from poetry.

It is apparently the opinion of one living critic—one from which I should be very reluctant to differ—that the ballads are poetry, but not the best poetry; not to be compared, for instance, with the best of Herrick, Gray, Landor, or Browning. His defence of them—and of us who love them—is that the contrast is unfair, "much as any contrast between children and grown folk would be unfair." The charm is that "they appealed to something young in the national mind." Again, we need not reject this explanation, but we may, I think, claim to interpret it in our own way. What is the "something young" in the mind of the ballad-lover? Is it really something which we, either as individuals or as a nation, have outgrown? And again, if we have outgrown it, is not that perhaps a change which we may regret, a change which we may find ourselves reversing by a still further growth?

I believe so, and my belief is founded upon the view which I hold of the nature and value of poetry. In that view the main pleasure or satisfaction derived from poetry by the man who hears or reads it is the enjoyment of a new and more perfect world. There is naturally present in most men, and strongly and frequently present in many, a sense of dissatisfaction with the sorry scheme of things in which we live, and a profound desire for an existence not wholly different in its elements but so recreated as to be no longer alien and oppressive to the spirit. But however strong this desire, there are but few who can recreate life for themselves, even in imagination. All

men are poets, especially in childhood, but the vast majority are poets only in a low degree; the power of grasping an intuition, of shaping an ideal, has remained undeveloped in them; they have never gained the power of so expressing their intuitions as to make them acceptable to others. But in the lovers of poetry the desire is still there, the desire for a beauty which is not unfamiliar but unspoiled, the home-sickness for a country which is their own transfigured in the light of a dream. It is for those who can work this transfiguration for us that we reserve the name of poet.

About the way of the poet, the process or power by which he works, there are many things to be said, but only two or three are now to our purpose. First, it is the poet's personality upon which all depends: the light which transfigures life for us is the light of *his* dream, the country to which he takes us is the native land of *his* spirit, and afterwards, if we will, of ours. It follows naturally, I think, that we are more likely to enter his kingdom thankfully and stay there long, if it very closely resembles that which is already ours, the so-called "real world" which we find so delightful if it were not so transient, so beautiful if it were not so squalid. The greatest moments of poetry are those of lyric or tragic intensity, when the ruins of earth are seen against the radiance of the eternal dawn. But in gentler scenes, too, the same sense of contrast may be present, even though it is only suggested, as by a distant cloud or the haunting murmur of Time. It was a theory of the mid-Victorian critics that poets could be divided into two classes:

those who guide us through the real world, and those who offer us a temporary escape from it to a refuge in the world of imagination; they labelled Browning "helpful," and William Morris only "restful." Morris, in the famous Apology which preludes *The Earthly Paradise,* no doubt seemed to countenance this view, claiming only that he strove

> to build a shadowy isle of bliss
> Midmost the beating of that steely sea,
> Where tossed about all hearts of men must be.

But the power of these very words lies not in their concealment but in their remembrance of the contrast they regret; and through the whole of Morris's poetry, as through the whole of his active life, this remembrance is continuous. The creator of Pompilia could not be less "restful" than he who told the story of Alcestis, the story of Sigurd, the story of the lovers of Gudrun; and Morris, even when he makes his foreground bright and throws only the distance into shadow, is none the less a sad and moving influence. Great poetry is never an escape from life; it is the desire for life renewed.

The poet, then, in recreating the world for us, haunts us with the remembrance of imperfection and perfection. And in doing this he uses the power of words, a power always great but at times working so strongly and inexplicably that we can only describe the effect as magical. I am not now speaking of words of beauty or fitness—words, for example, such as those which make up the bulk of Shakespeare's plays:

For what we have we prize not to the worth
Whiles we enjoy it, but being lacked and lost,
Why then we rack the value, then we find
The virtue that possession would not show us
Whiles it was ours.

These are fit words, and those which follow them are beautiful:

So will it fare with Claudio.
When he shall hear she died upon his words,
The idea of her life shall sweetly creep
Into his study of imagination:
And every lovely organ of her life
Shall come apparelled in more precious habit,
More moving-delicate and full of life,
Into the eye and prospect of his soul,
Than when she lived indeed: then shall he mourn,
And wish he had not so accused her.

Exquisite as these lines are, they do not surprise us; they are what we might have expected from Shakespeare, a characteristic, almost everyday utterance of the man we know familiarly. But this same man has moments when we know him no longer, flashes that play about him as from some unimaginable power. Suddenly, in a song, in a sonnet, in a speech, the words, though simple in themselves, are felt to be ranged in a magical order and to convey an emotion that is beyond their intellectual meaning, and almost beyond the personality of their author:

Fear no more the heat of the sun,
Nor the furious winter's rages,
Thou thy worldly task hast done,
Home art gone and ta'en thy wages.

Who that once heard them ever forgot those lines? Or these from Sonnet LXXIII:

> That time of year thou mayst in me behold
> When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang
> Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,
> Bare ruined choirs, where late the sweet birds sang.
> In me thou see'st the twilight of such day
> As after sunset fadeth in the west,
> Which, by and by, black night doth take away,
> Death's second self, that seals up all in rest.

or that short, piercing cry of Iras to Cleopatra, when all is lost:

> "Finish, good lady; the bright day is done,
> And we are for the dark."

or those moonlight memories of Titania:

> Never since the middle summer's spring
> Met we, on hill, in dale, forest, or mead,
> By pavèd fountain, or by rushy brook,
> Or on the beachèd margent of the sea,
> To dance our ringlets to the whistling wind,
> But with thy brawls thou hast disturbed our sport.

—angry words, but in the unmistakable dialect of fairyland.

And now what of the ballads? Is it possible, without the risk of doubting our former judgment, to think of them in the same hour with the passages I have quoted? For scope they are clearly not comparable; we should never look to find in them the deep glow of thought that broods over finished action, the pensive light "that after sunset lingers in the

west." But for sudden glories of pure romance, and for that mystery of shadows by which love and youth and beauty are turned to agony, and agony again to loveliness—in the ballads you need never look far for these.

True Thomas lay on Huntlie bank;
A ferlie he spied wi' his e'e;
And there he saw a ladye bright,
Come riding down by the Eildon Tree.

* * * * * *

"Harp and carp, Thomas," she said;
"Harp and carp along wi' me;
And if ye dare to kiss my lips,
Sure of your bodie I will be."—

* * * * * *

"And see ye not yon bonny road,
That winds about the fernie brae?
That is the road to fair Elfland,
Where you and I this night maun gae."

* * * * * *

O they rade on, and farther on,
And they waded through rivers aboon the knee,
And they saw neither sun nor moon,
But they heard the roaring of the sea.

That will always hold its place among the Midsummer Nights' Dreams of fairyland. Over against it may be set the dark and terrible romance of that other night, when the young lover was shamefully stabbed in sleep:

Clerk Saunders he started, and Margaret she turned
Into his arms as asleep she lay;
And sad and silent was the night
That was atween thir twae.

Still more haunting is the night when the dead man comes back:

"O cocks are crowing on middle earth,
I wot the wild fowls are boding day;
Give me my faith and troth again,
And let me fare me on my way."

and when Margaret stands above his grave:

"Is there ony room at your head, Saunders?
Is there ony room at your feet?"
Or ony room at your side, Saunders,
Where fain, fain, I wad sleep?"

These are but fragments from a poem where every verse has magic in it; a magic which by some inexplicable process turns the extremely natural into the extremely strange. Perhaps it is the same charm, too, that touches one stanza of *The Battle of Otterburn:*

Last night I dreamed a weary Dream
Beyond the Isle of Skye:
I saw a dead man win a fight,
And that dead man was I.

And another of *Sir Patrick Spens:*

Half-owre, half-owre to Aberdour
'Tis fifty fathoms deep,
And there lies gude Sir Patrick Spens,
Wi' the Scots lords at his feet.

And lastly this of *Mary Hamilton:*

> O little did my mother ken
> The day she cradled me,
> The lands I was to travel in,
> Or the death I was to die.

By these, and by a hundred other lines which every reader can pick out for himself, it is proved, I think, that the ballads have, in common with the best poetry, at least one very remarkable quality: a quality which is not intellectual, which is not actually necessary to the telling of a beautiful or moving story, but which seems to be added suddenly, beyond the expectation of the hearer, beyond even the intention of the singer himself. I am, for my part, convinced that this is so, and it seems to me to explain the undoubted fact that the work of a number of anonymous ballad-writers can give us at least one of the pleasures which we get from the work of great poets. The human spirit is perhaps not so completely divided as we think it; it is perhaps not, like the intellect, entirely the subject of private ownership and control. There may be visitings from a power beyond us, and they may come, however infrequently, to the small as well as to the great.

But there is, I think, another pleasure in respect of which the ballads will bear comparison with other poetry. The poet, as I have reminded you, satisfies one of our profoundest desires by creating a new world for us, and this he does by taking our old familiar world and filling it with a new light, the

peculiar radiance or twilight of his own personality. Now if we were to believe certain most learned students of ballad-literature, this satisfaction—the most characteristic and important gift of poetry—is the last which we should expect from ballads. Ballads, we are told, are not personal but communal in their origin, put together haphazard from the impromptu verses contributed by players in a round game. Or if one man made one ballad, it was merely the leader in the game, and his only object was to produce a popular chorus. In neither case, the work was not an act of expression; it was objective, free from all trace of the maker's personality. On the opposite side stand two other professors, both of whom assure us that the ballads are literary, not popular productions. One believes that they were made by the mediæval romancers or their successors, but afterwards came down in the world by passing through many humbler memories. The other suspects that they were the work of certain poets of the fifteenth century, who published other poems over their own names, but for some reason chose not to acknowledge these.

We may, I hope, reply to these three scholars that we acknowledge and envy their superiority in learning; we avail ourselves of their research, but we are unconvinced by their conclusions. Let us take their theories in order. However far back the origin of a ballad may be conjecturally placed, to believe that a poem was ever made by an evening-party is impossible to anyone who knows anything of poems or of

evening-parties. Then for the mediæval minstrel, we can believe anything that is proved of him, but hardly, I think, that he made the ballads in a form more beautiful than that in which we know them, and yet lived and died nameless. Nor did a known poet write them as we have them, for they are fatally unlike the work of any known poet. Here, then, we have three inconsistent theories, all partially supported by facts, but all unacceptable. Fortunately there is a fourth explanation—that of Professor Gummere—which satisfies, I think, all the terms of the problem. Were the ballads made by the people or by individuals? By both: first by individuals, and afterwards by the tradition of the generations through which they have come down to us. In other words, though a poem cannot be made by a committee working simultaneously, it may be made by a whole people working upon it in succession; and it will then represent or express not the obscure and forgotten individual who first roughed it out, but the view of life of the community which instinctively changed it to its own likeness.

The ballads, then, after all, are not so wholly impersonal as some have thought them; by choice, by rejection, and by addition they have been made to set forth a personal view, and this they do as consistently as if they were all the compositions of a single author. The view is the view of a nation and not of an individual, but it does mingle regret and desire, it does re-create the world for us.

After what fashion? Let us look once more at the ballads; not at the manner of them, but the matter,

the stories they tell, and the unconscious attitude which they reveal. The oldest of them are not of native origin; they come, as we have seen, from the ancient folklore of Europe and in particular from Scandinavia. But they are British by choice and favour; they were congenial from the first. The world they tell of is full of powers stronger than man—of Tam Lins and Queens of Elfland, and beyond it lies a grim life of the dead—fiery trials, mouldering graves, and vain revisitings of the beloved on earth. The tales are primitive, but, I think, not childish; a child may be pleased with them, but a child could not have made them. They have meaning —not symbolic meaning, for that must be consciously created; but they are in relation to human life. To read through *Thomas the Rhymer* or *Binnorie* and not to perceive this would be but a dull amusement. When True Thomas is warned of his danger, he replies:

> "Betide me weal, betide me woe,
> That weird shall never daunten me."
> Syne he has kissed her rosy lips,
> All underneath the Eildon Tree.

This is part of no childish fairy-tale; nor is this that tells of the harper who found the dead lady:

> He 's ta'en three locks o' her yellow hair,
> And wi' them strung his harp sae rare.

From the beginning, then, the ballads present life as a tale that has significance; and the significance

arises naturally—that is, not from the supernatural side, but from the human passions. The ballads do not blink the passions; there is no pretence that this world is a quiet or decent place. It is not only that death, the inevitable end, is unforgotten and unhidden, but in half the stories it comes tragically, by violence, by cruelty, by treachery, or by fatal error. But there is always the tragic redemption: unflinching acceptance, without rebellion, often without complaint. John Steward kills his wife's lover, as he thinks; in reality it is her son, Childe Maurice. The murderer throws the head into her lap:

> But when she looked on Childe Maurice's head
> She ne'er spoke words but three:
> "I never bare no child but one,
> And you have slain him, trulye."

Under the cruellest blows the people of that world do not wince; they know what must be done by their code, and they do it. They do not attempt to patch life; they end it. When Lord Gregory finds that his Fair Annie and her babe have been drowned at his own door, he curses his mother who has done the wrong, but makes no more ado.

> Then he 's ta'en out a little dart
> Hung low down by his gore;
> He thrust it through and through his heart,
> And words spake never more.

Glasgerion's lady, like Lucrece, scorns to outlive her honour. Glasgerion kills her betrayer, and follows:

He set the sword's point till his breast
The pommel till a stone;
Through the falseness of that lither lad
These three lives wern all gone.

It is pity—there is no lack of pity in the ballads. Even the greatest brute in the whole series, fause Edom o' Gordon, says, when he has killed the babe before its mother's eyes:

"I canna look on that bonnie face
As it lies on the grass."

No, there is no lack of pity, but there is also the recognition that, pitiful as death is, there are things more pitiful and not to be endured. At Otterburn, when Percy finds the Scots five to one against him, and his father sends to bid him wait for help, he replies that his troth is plight to Douglas:

"Yet had I liefer be rynde and rent
—By Mary, that mickle may!—
Than ever my manhood be reproved
With a Scot, another day.

Wherefore shoot, archers, for my sake!
And let sharp arrows flee.
Minstrels, play up for your waryson,
And well quit it shall be!"

On the other side Douglas is as good; when he knows his time has come, his only care is to keep the fight going; he bids his nephew take command and conceal his death:

"My wound is deep, I am fayn to sleep,
Take thou the vaward of me,
And hide me by the bracken bush
Grows on you lilye-lee."

With this may be matched the death of Robin Hood. When Little John finds his chief dying by the treachery of the Abbess of Kirkleys, he begs as a last boon to be allowed to burn the nunnery in revenge.

"Now nay, now nay," quoth Robin Hood,
"That boon I'll not grant thee;
I never hurt woman in all my life,
Nor men in their company.
I never hurt maid in all my time
Nor at mine end shall it be."

There are stout men, too, among the humbler outlaws of a later time: Johnnie of Cockerslee, fighting the Seven Foresters who have wounded him in his sleep:

"Stand stout, stand stout, my noble dogs,
Stand stout, and dinna flee!
Stand fast, stand fast, my good gray hounds,
And we will gar them dee!"

and Hobbie Noble, banished for his misdeeds, but scorning to his last hour the private treason by which he was brought to justice:

"I'd rather be ca'd Hobbie Noble,
In Carlisle, where he suffers for his faut,
Before I were ca'd the traitor Mains,
That eats and drinks o' the meal and maut."

Treachery, then, the ballad-makers hated; cruelty they regretted; and to hurt a woman, to turn away from a fight, or to give in before the blood gave out, was to them dishonour. They did not think it necessary to keep the law, but then the law was not of their own making; it was either the bondage of convention or the rule of the rich. They cared little for comfort; love and wine and gold they loved, but these are not comfort. The sleek sensual abbot, with his ambling pad and his fat money-bags, was their abhorrence—he and his ally, the hard, tyrannical sheriff, the mediæval chief of police. These two stood for a social order in which the spirit was enslaved to the body, and the body to mere authority. What Borderer could bear with that? What free man would not applaud the stout fellow who struck his blow, and took to the greenwood or the green road? The social order which the ballad-makers imagined for themselves, and which, at least in Northumberland and Nottingham, they supposed to have been put into practice, was a chaotic order, a wild and bloodstained life; but as they saw it and sang of it, it was a noble choice between two sets of evils. There are great possibilities, no doubt, in the life of peace and comfort, and we must hope they may some day be realised; but perhaps there is something to be said yet for the ballad life as an ideal. With all its crimes and sorrows, it was a life of the spirit; it was full of generosity and courage and sincerity; and, above all, it set Death in his right place.

It is but giving over of a game
That all must lose.

They may have been mistaken, the ballad-makers; they may have sympathised too much with passionate lovers and bonny fighters and the young and beautiful who flung their lives away. For my argument that does not matter; my point here is that they did rebuild the world in the imagination of the thoughts of their hearts, and their work may therefore be ranked with the work of the poets.

If, then, in beauty and in creative power the ballads are akin to other poetry, in what consists that "singularity" or peculiar character of which we have spoken—a singularity so marked that even the best ballads of Sir Walter Scott and Mr. Rudyard Kipling could not properly be bound up with them in one collection—a peculiar character the taste for which we are said to have outgrown? My answer is that the singularity lies in the artistic method of the ballads, and that I do not believe we have outgrown the pleasure to be got by it. No doubt among the minor devices of the old ballad-writers there are some which are worn out, but they were all good in their time, and there is no reason why they should not be replaced.

Up then crew the red, red cock,
And up and crew the grey,

was once a good way to tell of the dawn; it is still good in the story of Usher's Well, but it would not

be good in a modern poem, because it would not be natural or sincere. To admit this is not to give up the ballad form. There is far more in a poetical form than mere tricks of phrasing. "The mediæval ballad," says Professor Ker, "is a form used by poets with their eyes open upon life, and with a form of thought in their minds by which they comprehend a tragic situation." If life is to be no longer full of tragic situations, if the life of nations is to be no longer akin to the fighting life of our ancestors, then perhaps we can afford to discard that form of thought and put away the ballads as childish things.

That is not an easy belief at this moment; to some of us it has never been an easy belief. It is true that for generations now our greatest poetry has been subjective, introspective, analytical—often so intellectual as to be a reflection upon life rather than itself a form of life. But on the other side there have been changes too; the consciousness of national life has been so intensified that epic poetry has become once more possible. The ballads are, before all things, epic; they are the heroic life of a people told in lyric episodes. What is Mr. Kipling's *Ballad of East and West?* Is it a personal anecdote in verse? No, for the name of the hero is never mentioned; he is the Colonel's son, the servant of the White Queen, the type of the heroic West. What is Mr. Hardy's great poem *The Dynasts?* A drama in form, but an epic in form of thought, for it is concerned with individuals only as units of national life. To these reflections our present experience is adding another;

we are looking day by day upon a battle of nations, where valour is of little account unless it is the valour of millions, and where the bonniest fighter asks for no glory but the realisation that he has "done his bit." The poets will in time sing of this battle, and will thereby express a multitude of individual feelings, their own and other men's, in forms which will be new and necessary. But it may be that one or two, less distinguished, less differentiated from the national type, will be moved to express more elementary feelings by a more objective method. If so, they will be likely enough to utter in the old ballad form—a form, I believe, still of very powerful enchantment, capable of moving the heart both with the sound of the trumpet and with the deeper music of the harp of Binnorie, strung with remembrance of the dead.

X

FUTURISM AND FORM IN POETRY

It is a curious fact, and one worthy of the psychologist's attention, that the presentation of a new idea, the spreading of a new movement, causes in the world of art precisely the same reactions as a similar event causes in the world of politics. In both cases there is a certain amount of genuine enthusiasm, and a certain acclamation by the restless and ignorant; in both the great central mass remains inert; in both the loudest cry is that of outraged and indignant feeling. We accept this parallelism as a natural one, only, I think, because we are in this country politicians first and lovers of art in a very secondary degree. The Conservative in politics—if we may assume that he still exists—has a justification which cannot be pleaded by the conservative in art. It is sacrifice and not tolerance which is demanded of the former; he is called upon to suffer an alteration in the preliminary conditions of his life, an alteration which may benefit a section of the community, but in the great majority of cases will impose a fresh limitation upon the liberty of his own class. In the world of art, on the other hand, a new idea, a new method, is a gift and not an exchange, still less a forced exchange; it claims

not to alter or supersede the existing conditions, but to increase and diversify production; not to limit freedom, but to extend it.

There is, then, not even a selfish reasonableness in the anger which commonly greets a new theory of art, or a new method in any of the arts. The arrival of a Monet, a Matisse, a Picasso, does not confine our enjoyment of pictures to works of the Impressionist, Post-Impressionist, or Cubist Schools; the publication of the works of Walt Whitman, Verhaeren, and Marinetti cannot take from us our power of reading Milton, Pope, or Bridges; it need not even diminish the popularity of the older writers, and it certainly cannot interfere with the self-expression of a living poet, if the vision with which he happens to be gifted is of a different kind. In any art all methods may co-exist, because all visions are independent and possible; and it is only after a period of such co-existence that one vision or method can establish itself as more generally attractive than another. The verdict, no doubt, will ultimately be that of the majority, but it will be the expression of a preference, not of a prohibition; the minority will be free to take their own way as before. It is especially true that every man can have the poetry he deserves; so that the passion for burning heretics is even more unintelligible here than elsewhere. Any attempt to make it intelligible would be vain; it is probably an ultimate fact of human nature. Let us lament it and pass on.

There remains the simple unprejudiced lover of poetry—what is to be his attitude? Must he accept

anything and everything that comes? That would be to flutter every way in turn, like a rag caught in a tree-top; but it is the inevitable fate of the reader who continues to read contemporary poets without clearing up his beliefs on the nature of poetry, and establishing some better principle for judging it than the likes and dislikes of the moment in which he takes it up. Everyone has his own taste, it is said, but this is almost the opposite of the truth. The taste of nine men out of ten is an indiscriminate blend of many and various tastes, borrowed chiefly from schoolmasters and journalists. The tenth perhaps owes less to such instructors, but is even less able to judge for himself, for knowing that his preference does not spring from what is called "an educated taste," he is always ready to doubt it, or even to discard it, when he finds himself differing from others. What his literary friend has slighted he can no longer enjoy, even behind locked doors.

But these troubles and disabilities do not affect the man who is not only a lover of poetry, but has possessed himself of a clear æsthetic principle, a criterion by which to test his first impressions. A reader so equipped will give a fearless and impartial welcome to a new poet or a new movement; he will be conscious of his own power to distinguish between possible and impossible aims in art, and between adequacy and inadequacy in the methods proposed for attaining them.

My object here is not to discuss æsthetic principles, but to apply them in this way as a test of the value

of the Futurist movement in poetry. I shall assume, therefore, that my readers have already approved the standpoint to which I have led them on several previous occasions; and for the sake of clearness I will recall it by a few brief notes.

The spirit of man has two activities: the æsthetic or intuitive activity by which he gains perceptions, and the intellectual or scientific activity by which he makes concepts or judgments. Poetry is the expression in human language of our intuitions: prose is the expression of our judgments. Poetry is therefore in its origin a very simple affair; we are all constantly grasping perceptions, that is, creating states of consciousness; and whenever we express this activity in words we are in a literal sense making poetry. But this we do not dignify by the name of poetry: we reserve that title for creations more distinguished. Good poetry, poetry in the full sense of the word, is the masterly expression of rare, difficult, and complex states of consciousness, of intuitions in which the highest thought is fused with simple perceptions, until both together become a new emotion. And of all the possible emotions, the strongest and most binding is felt when the poet's consciousness of this world is tinged with man's universal longing for a world more perfect; for when the life which he creates is nearest to the life we must ourselves live, then the eternal contrast is most visible and most poignant.

There is one more note to be added, and it is a peculiarly important one for our present inquiry. Poetry cannot exist without form. Not only is it im-

possible for man to create the formless, but by an equally natural law he cannot in any art express his intuition without using a form exactly adapted to it. A coarse or feeble perception cannot be beautified by an effort of style; a fine and vivid perception will achieve expression in a form which, however simple or subtle, will be fine and vivid too. The language of poetry may or may not be what is called metrical, but it will always be rhythmical, for the essential movement of life is rhythmical, and emotion is most rhythmical when it is most living. In poetry worthy of the name, though the syllables may follow no apparent formula, the emotion will move along lines of power and order.

The principles which I have thus summarised are not the creed of a school, or the war-cry of a movement, whether of attack or defence; they do not depend even upon the practice of great poets in the past, though they have been invariably exemplified by it. They are purely scientific, and should enable us to confront any theory, however revolutionary, with the passionless interest of science.

Let us proceed, then, to study the Futurist Manifestos.

The first of them I do not propose to deal with fully; it is now ten or twenty years old, and it refers to plastic rather than literary art. But it explains the original idea, and the name, of a new movement. Futurism is the revolt against the oppression of the present by the past. A more appropriate name for it would be that of Presentism, for it is the present,

the moment of actual life, that it seeks to defend and express; but as its success is a matter of expectation rather than possession, it is content to claim the future only. This early Manifesto, reprinted in England as preface to a catalogue of pictures, contained some practical proposals for diminishing the tyranny of the past. Such towns as Venice were to be destroyed, together with all ancient monuments and all works of art over twenty years old. Living artists were to be restricted to a twenty-years day; at the age of forty they must disappear from the world of art, and their works with them. In this way life would be cleared and kept clear of the obsession of antiquity and classicalism; by constant cutting back the plant would be compelled to spring only from the root, and not from last season's hardened wood.

I need hardly say that English readers smiled at this exasperated, sanguine, grotesque document; they had two reasons for smiling. First, they had never themselves suffered from a superabundance of antiquities, or of native Old Masters; secondly, they were accustomed to value traditions highly, for the sake of comfort; as we value old boots, even when they are no longer very sound or presentable. There may have been other and better reasons, but these were enough; we were looking at the question from the point of view of a very modern nation, artistically modern, and not of a very ancient one, dwarfed, encumbered, and distracted by the persistence of its own historic achievements. We visit and admire Italy as a vast museum and picture gallery; we have

never considered whether a museum or picture gallery is the kind of place we should like to live in, to do business in, to make love in. To one Englishman at least it was a revelation to hear Mr. Marinetti use the word Professor. In England a Professor is a rare and timid creature who spends his obscure life underground, and is ready, when whistled for, to come out of his burrow and give up whatever he may have found there. In Italy, it seems, he is a member of the largest and most powerful section of the community; he is heaped with honours and prestige; he owns all the towns in the country and a good deal of the land, takes precedence of all the professions and trades, and leaves them only the back streets and suburbs to work in. Moreover, says Mr. Marinetti, he monopolises all the conversation, and issues regulations for all the arts.

As a nation we laugh at this, but we do not all laugh at all of it. Those to whom art is a living thing and the future of art a matter of national interest, are well aware that even in this country the dead weight of the past is no merely Italian nightmare. The English poet, the English painter, knows by long experience that if his intuition takes an unfamiliar form it will be inevitably received with indifference or hostility: not because of the Professors—we have but a dozen, some intelligent and nearly all negligible—but because of the national belief that in art beauty and power are secrets of the dead, and imitation the only escape from decadence. In splendid disproof of this, our best poets have all been innovators; in spite

of a rich inheritance, they have been independent workers, and if they have left behind them a tradition, it is a tradition not so much of the laws and ceremonies of poetry as of its creative freedom. In this sense they have all been Futurists.

But Mr. Marinetti could not remain satisfied with this general conception of Futurism; he went further, and attempted to mark out some of the lines along which the three arts of painting, poetry, and music must in his opinion develop. His scheme of Futurist poetry, which alone concerns us to-day, is contained in another Manifesto, and exemplified by a specially composed poem. The Manifesto may be epitomised as follows:

The Futurist Consciousness [1]

Futurism is based on that complete renewal of human sensibility which has taken place since the great scientific discoveries. Those who to-day use telegraphs, telephones, gramophones, cycles, motor-cars, transatlantics, dirigibles, aeroplanes, kinematographs, big daily papers (synthesis of the world's day), do not realise that these different means of communication, of transit, and of information, exercise a very effective effect on their *Psyche*. The ordinary man may, with a day's train journey, go from a small city with empty squares, where the sun, the dust, and the wind play in silence, to a great capital bristling with lights, movements, and cries. . . . The pusillanimous and sedentary citizen of any provincial town can afford himself the intoxication of danger by following in a kinema-show big game shooting in the Congo. . . . Such possi-

[1] Epitomised from the translation by Mr. Harold Monro in *Poetry and Drama* for September, 1913.

bilities, to the far-seeing observer, appear as plastic and creative influences working on our sensibility, and producing the following highly significant phenomena:

1. Acceleration of life, which has now, almost universally, a quick rhythm.

2. Horror of that which is old and known. Love of the new and the unforeseen.

3. Abhorrence of a quiet life. Love of danger and attraction toward the heroism of daily life.

4. Destruction of the feeling of *the beyond,* and increased value of the individual, who "doit vivre sa vie."

5. Multiplication and inexhaustibility of human desires and ambitions.

6. Exact knowledge of that which is for each unrealisable and unreachable.

7. Semi-equality of man and woman, diminution of the difference between their social rights.

8. Depreciation of love. . . . The lover pure and simple has lost all prestige. Love has lost its absolute value.

9. Passion, art, and idealism in business. A purely financial consciousness.

10. Man multiplied by the machine. New mechanical sense, fusion of instinct with horse-power, and with chained forces.

11. Passion, art, idealism in sport. Conception and love of the record.

12. New touristic consciousness of transatlantics and large hotels (meetings and synthesis of different races and peoples). Destruction of distances and the homesick feeling of solitude.

13. A new world-consciousness. . . . Man has successively conquered the sense of the home, the sense of the quarter in which he lives, the sense of the city, the sense of the geographical zone, the sense of the continent. To-day Man possesses a world-feeling: his need of knowing what his ancestors *did* is moderate: that of knowing

what his contemporaries *are doing,* in all parts of the world, is incessant.

14. Nausea of the curved line, of the spiral, of that which revolves. Love of the straight line and of the terminal. Horror of slowness of details, of prolix analysis, and of explanations. Love of speed, of abbreviation, of summary and synthesis.

15. Love of depth and insight in every mental and spiritual activity.

Words at Liberty

Casting aside now all foolish definitions and theories of the professors, I declare to you that lyricism is simply the exceptional faculty of intoxicating and being intoxicated with life: the power of changing into wine the muddy water of the life which surrounds and crosses us: the power of painting the world with the wondrous colours of our mutable ego.

Now suppose, for instance, that a friend of yours, endowed with this lyrical faculty, finds himself in a zone of intense life (revolution, war, shipwreck, earthquake), and immediately afterwards comes and relates his impressions to you. . . . Disregarding syntax . . . chucking adjectives and punctuation overboard, he will despise all mannerism or preciosity of style, and will seek to stir you by hurling a confused medley of sensations and impressions at your head. Following the irregular impulse of his fancy, he will spread, broadcast, handfuls of essential words. The sole pre-occupation of the narrator is to render all the shocks and vibrations of his ego.

If, in addition to the power of lyrical expression, he has a mind full of general ideas, he will, involuntarily and at every moment, link up his sensations with those of the whole universe he knows and feels . . . he will create an immense net of analogies . . . he will reproduce telegraphically the analogical basis of life. . . .

This need of laconic method not only answers to the laws of speed which govern us, but also to the eternal relations between poet and public . . . the same relations as between two old friends who can easily understand each other by means of a word, a gesture, or a glance . . . the poet's imagination must connect distant objects without connecting wires, and by means only of essential words, and these absolutely at liberty.

Wireless Imagination

By wireless imagination I mean an entire freedom of images and analogies, expressed by disjointed words and without the connecting wires of syntax. . . . Wireless imagination and the use of free words will lead us to the essence of Matter . . . we may animalise, vegetalise, mineralise, electrify, and liquefy style, making it, to a certain extent, live the same life as that of matter.

Semaphoric Adjectivation

We tend everywhere toward suppressing the qualifying adjective, because it presupposes an interruption in intuition, a too minute definition of the substantive. . . . One must consider adjectives as railway or semaphoric signals of style, which serve to regulate the speed of the race of analogies.

Verb in the Infinitive

In violent and dynamic lyrical expression the infinitive mood will be indispensable because it . . . negatives in itself the existence of the sentence, and prevents the style from stopping and sitting down at a fixed spot. While the infinitive mood is round and true as a wheel, the other moods and tenses are either triangular, square, or oval.

Onomatopœia and Mathematical Signs

Onomatopœia, which seems to vivify lyricism with the crude and brutal elements of reality, has been used in poetry more or less timidly from Aristophanes to Pascoli. We Futurists initiate its bold and constant use. This must not, however, be systematic. . . . We abolish all . . . the lucid chains by which the traditional poets bind their images to their sentences. We use instead brief and anonymous mathematical and musical signs, and place in brackets indications such as (presto) (piu presto) (rallentando) (due tempi) to regulate the speed of the style.

Typographiical Revolution

Our revolution is directed against the so-called typographical harmony of the page, which is opposed to the flux and reflux, the jerks and bursts of style that are represented on it. We shall use, therefore, in the same page, three or four different colours of ink, and if necessary even twenty different forms of type.

Free and Expressive Orthography

Our lyrical intoxication must freely unmake words and make them anew, cutting them down and lengthening them, strengthening their centres or their extremities, augmenting or diminishing the number of their vowels and consonants. Thus we shall have a new orthography, which I name "free expression." This deformation of words according to instinct is in accord with our natural tendency towards Onomatopœia.

In all this there is much that it startling and much that is obviously true. But if we allow ourselves to fix our attention upon isolated points of agreement

or disagreement, we shall only be distracted. We must disentangle the main thread of the argument, and fortunately this is not difficult to do. It runs thus: Recent scientific discoveries have so developed human sensibility as to cause an actual renewal or replacement of the old feelings by new ones. New feelings necessitate new forms of expression; and as the new feelings are chiefly due to speed, noise, violence, and applied science, the new expression should be appropriately condensed, loud, brutal, wireless, semaphoric, and generally as materialistic as possible.

Now, of these three propositions there is one which, if taken away from the context, would command our immediate assent. New feelings must have new forms of expression; that is the guarantee of the eternal persistence of poetry. For since every feeling is a new and unique experience, being the experience of an ever-changing individual personality, the expression of it will also be new in some degree, and in the case of highly gifted personalities will be new in a high degree. Thus the possibilities of poetry can never be exhausted. But although in one sense all feelings are new, in another sense they are all old; love, hate, joy, restlessness, will always be love, hate, joy, and restlessness, however new the experiences may be which happen to move them from time to time. Mr. Martinetti does not seem to have perceived this: he uses the words "human sensibility," but what he describes is merely an enlargement of human *experience*. We take delight in speed; but is not the delight of the motorist the same as that of his grandfather, to whom

trains were a novelty, and that again the same as the joy of his savage ancestors when they first rode races on the plain or shot the rapids in a birch canoe? Are not a fall from an aeroplane and a fall from a mountain both causes of the same terror and the same destruction of all sense? There is a new variety of experience, but the sensibility is the old sensibility. It is true that we have some reason for believing that our consciousness does in certain ways differ from that of our remote predecessors; for example, modern love is admitted to be a very different thing from primitive love. But here the newness is due to the fact that we include now in one complex state of consciousness several sets of emotions which were originally kept distinct; it is not due to any change in human sensibility.

Now it is just this error in scientific analysis which has led away Mr. Marinetti—himself a poet—upon a path divergent from that of all other poets. Hitherto the way of the poet has been to take the actual world around him, with all its stocks and stones, its birds and beasts, its activities and accidents, and not only to grasp them as intuitions, to recreate these unknown and unknowable materials as states of his own consciousness, but to express them in a form of language. By so doing, what is it that he has always given us? The raw materials? No, but his own consciousness of them, the new world which he has made out of them.

You might think from a certain phrase of Mr. Marinetti's that this is what the Futurist poet, too, is

to aim at. "Lyricism," he says, "is the power of changing into wine the muddy water of the life which surrounds and crosses us: the power of painting the world with the wondrous colours of our mutable ego." Unfortunately, he follows this up with an example which puts a totally different interpretation upon it. He pictures a lyrical friend coming fresh from the scene of intense life, war, shipwreck, or earthquake, and seeking to stir you by relating "his impressions." How does he do it? He hurls at you a confused medley of words, in "his sole preoccupation to render all the shocks and vibrations of his ego." That is to say, he attempts to *record* or *relate* his impressions, not to express them; his sole preoccupation is to give you no new world of his own creation, but the raw materials as he himself received them, expecting confidently that they will be to you exactly what they were to him. That may be a perfectly reasonable thing to do, but it is work for prose rather than for poetry. Not so, the Futurist may reply, for it is not only my information, but my emotion that I am trying to convey to you. But a chaos of unconnected nouns and infinitives, the mere lifeless and disjected limbs of speech, cannot convey emotion. I add my voice, replies the Futurist, and by it I can both exhibit my own emotion and reproduce the sounds which caused it. The claim is justified, as no one will deny who has ever heard Mr. Marinetti's superb mingling of mimicry and declamation. But whereas he mimics and declaims, the poet does something quite different. The poet changes the water of experience

into the wine of emotion, not by the tones of his voice, but by the magic of ordered language. He does not give you the elements of matter and nervous excitement for you to make of them what you can; he gives you his own intuition already made, his own world already created, and so created as to exist eternally, when the vibrations of his voice have long since passed into silence. The power of the Futurist is a real power, akin to that of the actor, but no purpose is served by grouping it with a totally different power under the name of poetry. It is not poetical, it is histrionic, or, as the Futurist himself would prefer to say, it is gramophonic, and it has the limitations of the gramophone. When the instrument is there to perform the piece, you get your result, whatever it may be: but when the instrument is lost or broken, you are left with a mere "record," that is, a sheet of ingenious scientific marks, wholly dead and almost wholly unintelligible.

To see how literally true this is you have only to look at a Futurist "poem"—not at one of those which merely differ from other loosely written verse in celebrating more noisily the excitements of speed and destruction—but at such a "poem" as that which Mr. Marinetti has himself constructed to illustrate the principles of his Manifesto. I give here but a small fragment of it, and I give it, of course, in the state in which alone it is accessible to most readers, the state of a musical score or gramophone "record" without the emotional element so lavishly provided by the original performer when present in person.

"Bataille

"Poids+Odeur

"Midi ¾ flutes glapissement embrasement toumtoumb alarme Gargaresch craquement crépitation marche Cliquetis sacs fusils sabots clous canons crinières roues caissons juifs beignets pains-a-l'huile cantilènes échoppes bouffées chatoiement chassie puanteur cannelle fadeur flux reflux poivre rixe vermine tourbillon orangers-en-fleur filigrane misère des échecs cartes jasmin+muscade+rose arabesque mosaïque charogne hérissement+savates mitrailleuses=galets+ressac +grenouilles Cliquetis sacs fusils canons ferraille atmosphère=plombs+lave+trois cents puanteurs+cinquante parfums pavé matelas détritus crottin charognes flic-flac entassement chameaux bourricots tohubohu cloaque."

I take that, as it is meant, seriously. I have a general idea that it is an attempt to describe a scene of confusion, of disgusting confusion, but I cannot follow the details with any confidence, I cannot be even sure that I read it correctly. No doubt the notation, the arrangement of capital letters and mathematical symbols would in time become familiar, but before we take upon ourselves the burden of a new method of composition we are entitled to ask for some guarantee that it will eventually serve our purpose at least as well as the old. Will a "record" of this kind, in the hands either of a silent reader or of a reciter who is not himself the composer, ever produce either the creative or the emotional effect of poetry? If Mr. Marinetti had composed a Passéist poem as well as a Futurist "record" upon the same

subject we might have been able to judge. In default of this I have myself made a humble but careful attempt to put the raw material of a well-known English poem into Futurist form. So far as I have been able to understand the new system, this is how Keats, if he had been a Futurist, would have used the experience of a certain summer morning in a garden in Hampstead. The title I am doubtful about, for he certainly would not have used so traditional a word as Ode or so abstract a word as Reflection. Perhaps he might have called it:

BI-PLANING

Nightingale+Misery

1. Heart-ache numbness pain=opiate envy+happiness jug-jug-jug-bubble-bubble beech-trees summer shadows.

2. Drink coolness wine=Flora country-dance song mirth vintage bubbles flushes beads brim.

3. To drink=fade away dissolve forget *minus* fever fret palsy age pallor youth spectre sorrow despair Love Beauty to-morrow.

4. Away! Poesy jug-jug-jug-bubble-bubble night moon darkness breezes moss.

5. Flowers darkness half a dozen smells hawthorn eglantine violets muskrose murmur of flies.

6. Death = ease + richness+jug-jug-jug-bubble-bubble, = ecstasy deafness requiem sod.

7. Bird *minus* death, same old jug-jug-jug Antiquity Emperor Clown Ruth tears windows foam fairy-land forlornness.

8. Forlornness=bell all alone again good-bye jug-jug-jug-bubble-bubble meadows hillside valley going going gone vision dream waking sleeping Query.

Let no one imagine that I have made this little experiment as a *reductio ad absurdum* of Futurism. It is an honest attempt to contrast two kinds of work, and it gives away this immense advantage to the newer invention, that the original vertebrate structure of the "Ode to a Nightingale" is already well known, so that this heap of disarticulated bones has more than its fair chance of conveying a meaning. But I am content, because the example sufficiently proves that a system of notation, even when it is intelligible, is not language, and therefore, though it may be used in description or enumeration, it cannot achieve anything creative. It may make a statement, and be allowed, perhaps, to rank with prose; but it cannot give form in any degree, and it is form which is the distinguishing characteristic of every work of art.

In this attempt to invent a new kind of poetry which shall dispense with form, Mr. Marinetti has been supposed by some to be borrowing from Walt Whitman, and he himself speaks as if he were a legitimate descendant of the writers of *vers libre*. In both cases the affinity is only illusory. The effort of the *vers-libristes* is to free themselves, not from form, but from forms—from the forms of older writers. Their claim is to be allowed to use the form which is their own, the form of their intuition. When a critic objects that their work is "formless," he means, and can only mean, that its form is too vague to please him; the difference is at bottom a difference in ideals. The poems remain creative, though the beauty they

create may not be pleasing. The work of some of our greatest poets has in this same way incurred unpopularity; the extreme instance is perhaps that of Donne, who is only now being pardoned for seeing things in his own way.

Whitman, too, is always creative. It is true that in many of his poems there are passages in which he seems to have anticipated Mr. Marinetti—he loves modern life and machinery and often falls into mere statement or simple enumeration. But the resemblance is only superficial: even here his work is creation with a defect—the defect of incomplete fusion. His enumerations are by their nature pieces of prose, but his intention is to melt them down into the substance of his intuitions. Sometimes he succeeds, and the result is an impression of great originality; when he fails, the reader has to suffer a weary interval of suspended imagination, during which the vision and the rhythm are both obstructed. Presently the lumps are subdued or rolled away and the metal runs liquid and glowing again. The following lines from his poem called "Passage to India" are appropriate to this and several other points in our discussion:

Singing my days,
Singing the great achievements of the present,
Singing the strong light works of engineers,
Our modern wonders (the antique ponderous Seven outvied)
In the Old World, the East, the Suez Canal,
The New by its mighty railroad spann'd,
The seas inlaid with eloquent gentle wires;

Yet first to sound, and ever sound, the cry with thee, O soul,
The Past! the Past! the Past!

* * * * * * *

Not you alone, proud truths of the world,
Nor you alone, ye facts of modern science,
But myths and fables of old, Asia's, Africa's fables,
The far-darting beams of the spirit, the unloos'd dreams,
The deep-diving bibles and legends,
The daring plots of the poets, the elder religions;
O you temples fairer than lilies pour'd over by the rising sun!
O you fables spurning the known, eluding the hold of the known, mounting to heaven!
You lofty and dazzling towers, pinnacled, red as roses, burnish'd with gold!
Towers of fables immortal fashion'd from mortal dreams!
You too I welcome, and fully the same as the rest!
You too with joy I sing.

* * * * * * *

A worship new I sing,
You captains, voyagers, explorers, yours,
You engineers, you architects, machinists, yours,
You, not for trade or transportation only,
But in God's name, and for thy sake, O soul.

Passage to India!
Lo! soul, for thee of tableaus twain
I see in one the Suez Canal initiated, open'd,
I see the procession of steamships, the Empress Eugénie's leading the van,
I mark from on deck the strange landscape, the pure sky, the level sand in the distance,
I pass swiftly the picturesque groups, the workmen gather'd,
The gigantic dredging machines.

In one again, different (yet thine, all thine, O soul, the same),
I see over my own continent the Pacific railroad surmounting every barrier,
I see continual trains of cars winding along the Platte carrying freight and passengers,
I hear the locomotives rushing and roaring, and the shrill steam-whistle,
I hear the echoes reverberate through the grandest scenery in the world,
I cross the Laramie Plains, I note the rocks in grotesque shapes, the buttes,
I see the plentiful larkspur and wild onions, the barren colourless sage-deserts,
I see in glimpses afar or towering immediately above the great mountains, I see the Wind river and the Wahsatch mountains,
I see the Monument Mountain and the Eagle's nest, I pass the Promontory, I ascend the Nevadas,
I scan the noble Elk mountain and wind around its base,
I see the Humboldt range, I tread the valley and cross the river,
I see the clear waters of Lake Tahoe, I see forests of majestic pines.
Or crossing the great desert, the alkaline plains, I behold enchanting mirages of waters and meadows,
Marking through these and after all, in duplicate slender lines,
Bridging the three or four thousand miles of land travel,
Tying the Eastern to the Western sea,
The road between Europe and Asia.
(Ah, Genoese, thy dream! thy dream!
Centuries after thou art laid in thy grave
The shore thou foundest verifies thy dream.)

Passage to India!
Struggles of many a captain, tales of many a sailor dead,

Over my mood stealing and spreading they come
Like clouds and cloudlets in the unreach'd sky.

* * * * * * *

O we can wait no longer,
We too take ship, O soul,
Joyous we too launch out on trackless seas,
Fearless for unknown shores on waves of ecstasy to sail.

* * * * * * *

Passage to more than India!
Are thy wings plumed indeed for such far flights?
O soul, voyagest thou indeed on voyages like those?
Disportest thou on waters such as those?
Soundest below the Sanskrit and the Vedas?
Then have they bent unleash'd.

* * * * * * *

Passage, immediate passage! the blood burns in my veins!
Away, O soul! hoist instantly the anchor! . . .
Sail forth, steer for the deep waters only,
Reckless, O soul, exploring, I with thee, and thou with me,
For we are bound where mariner has not yet dared to go,
And we will risk the ship, ourselves and all.

O my brave soul!
O farther, farther sail!
O daring joy, but safe! are they not all the seas of God?
O farther, farther, farther sail!

Say what you will of that, you cannot say that it is not poetry. It appeals to a sensibility which is not a sensibility of the nerves only. The writer's preoccupation is not to render the shocks and vibrations of his ego: even when he catalogues he means the catalogue to be part of a creative, idealist effort, and the effort, the poem as a whole, is successful and will

always be successful, without the supplementary excitement of the composer's voice. Mr. Marinetti has not, then, imitated Walt Whitman. I do not feel sure that he has ever read him. He has approached this new material of the modern world from quite another point of view and attempted to deal with it on quite other lines. He is an Italian patriot, in revolt against two evils which are troubling the Latin world, but not the Anglo-Saxon. One, as we have seen, is the excessive cult of the past; a yoke the more grievous because the past of Italy, however glorious, is hardly her past in any true sense—it is the past of Rome. The other is the sensual sentimentality which bears the name of Romanticism. "La race latine," Mr. Marinetti has said, "vît dans l'exaspération, l'obsession, de la femme." His natural and perhaps justifiable instinct is to call away his countrymen from their worship of D'Annunzio to pursuits which tend to courage, self-reliance, endurance, and efficiency. Mechanical inventions will furnish these; but when he reproduces the shocks and vibrations received and calls the result poetry, I suspect that he is deceiving his followers for their good. "Our point of view," he has admitted, "is not entirely an artistic one," and again, "it has a value which is polemical rather than poetical."

Here, then, we may leave Mr. Marinetti; but not without admiration for his courage and his brilliant talents, nor without gratitude for the light which he has flashed, as by reflection, upon our own problem, the future of our own poetry.

That problem is generally stated—it was stated, for instance, by the late Mr. Frederick Myers—as though it closely resembled the problem of our coal supplies. We are warned of coming exhaustion; we are exhorted to find new stores of fuel or to invent new engines to burn new substances on new principles. The possible subjects have all been "done," and even if fresh varieties of them could be found, there are no fresh epithets, rhymes, or rhythms with which to "treat" them.

This admonition is obviously addressed to the poets; and to say that is perhaps to criticise it sufficiently, for advising a poet on the difficulty of producing poetry is like advising a fig-tree on the difficulty of producing figs. The common earth, the common air and rain, will never fail him for material, and if he deserves his name he will always by his own nature have the power of converting his material into figs, and will do so even though his critics bray loudly for thistles. The point does not need labouring; any subject that moves a poet's emotion is a good subject, and any form that expresses his emotion is a good form; the secret lies in his creative power. Exhaustion of means is as remote as infinity; and very little has yet been done at all. Look through the English poets; pick out all the poems of real value on Love, Death, Summer, Music, or any other of the oldest things in life; you will in each case fill but a small volume—a mere gleaning from the immense harvest of human experience that is hourly being reaped into silence. Look again; put together all the poems written in this metre

or in that; you will seldom find half a dozen, often only two. One thing you will discover—that even here your grouping is a false classification; for two poems may be technically in the same metre and yet have no resemblance to each other. This is a fact of real importance just now, when we have happily dethroned the graven image called Style. We have ceased to love affectation, elaboration, imitation of models; we must not go on to make the mistake of imagining that a metre once used is used up. A form, a metre, a stanza may be used a hundred times by a hundred writers, and each time with originality if it expresses each time a fresh personal vision. We are happy in having an example close at hand. One of our oldest and most familiar metres, one of the few in which thousands of lines have been written, is the Rhyme-royal of Chaucer. It was in this same metre that William Morris told some of the dreamiest tales of his Earthly Paradise. In this metre only a year or two ago was written a poem called "The Widow in the Bye Street." Mr. Masefield has there treated a story of man's oldest passions in their newest setting; it is a story of amazing range, and since the poet has things to say that Chaucer never thought, he uses that metre with a freedom to which Chaucer never attained. In the last section alone of that poem there are passages of simple narrative, similes, the phantasmagoria of a dying brain, a terse and poignant dialogue—eight speeches in a single stanza—a sombre Trial at Law, death sentence and execution, and a final scene in flowery uplands, idyll and tragedy

mingled in a beauty that is beyond description. Through all these changes there is no check, no jar, no flaw in the sincerity of the expression. The metre may be of any emotion you please; the vision, the voice, the rhythm, the life of the poem are altogether of to-day.

It is not the poets, then, who are in trouble, nor is it the technique or the subject-matter of poetry that is the question of the future for us. The evil with which we have to contend is once more that old belief that form in art is an adornment, an added beauty independent of the subject and less important; that the poet especially is a decorator, whose work is a luxury, and who is in danger of finding himself out of employment because he has used up all the stock patterns and cannot invent new ones that will please his patrons. The belief and the pessimism go naturally together; if we can rid ourselves of the one we shall no longer suffer from the other. It is here that the Futurists have, I think, been helpful. They have exhorted us to greater freedom and independence in expression, and this is always to the good. They have also invited us to write poetry without form, that is, to create without the breath of life. This, too, is a service for which we may be grateful; for by urging us towards the impossible, they have helped to save us from the fear of it.

XI

POETRY AND EDUCATION

We seem to be slowly but inevitably nearing the end of a great struggle, in which our public services have worked with unusual success. It is characteristic of our nation that we are already beginning to take account, not so much of our successes as of our failures and weaknesses. A people gifted with sound nerves, an easy temperament, and exceptionally good practical instincts, is naturally inclined to take life as it comes and to spend less time and thought than others do, upon scientific method. We are conscious of this as a weakness, and when anything goes wrong we are always quick to suppose that the failure must be due to some defect in our system. And as we believe at bottom in men rather than in services or institutions, the system which we criticise is generally our educational system, as that which produces the units of our power.

This consciousness of a defect, this particular trend of self-criticism, is, I believe, not a sign of weakness or overdue diffidence, but one more proof of the nation's practical instinct. We are not in the least danger of falling in love with machinery, or of putting our trust in a régime of handcuffs and strait-

waistcoats. But we are perhaps in danger of replacing one system by another without sufficiently ascertaining where the old one failed and in what way the new one will do better. A course of physical exercises may be more methodical than a walking tour or a month's sport, and yet less advantageous for a particular man or a particular purpose. If we are to be more scientific in our education, the first step must be towards a more scientific view of education: we must be clear about the meaning we give to the word. In the past we have never been clear about this, except when we have been narrow: and now that our view is rapidly widening, clearness is more desirable than ever. For lovers of poetry this is especially true, for the value of literature in education has been almost more misunderstood than the value of science.

The poets have long been aware of this, and one of the greatest of them, writing just a hundred years ago during a great European war, has again and again thrown the broad light of genius across our line of thought. I say across, and not along it, because in Wordsworth's day the question had a different aspect. In the Prelude it is Poetry and not Science which is driven to cry aloud against the futility of the current education. But the interests of the two are the same: both are activities of the human spirit. Life cannot pursue one of them to the exclusion of the other; for education both are indispensable and confused thinking on this point must be fatal to both.

Wordsworth says that he reached his own point

of view by chance or rather by following what was for him an instinctive pleasure, the habit of walking on the highways and talking with those whom he met there.

> When I began to enquire,
> To watch and question those I met, and speak
> Without reserve to them, the lonely roads
> Were open schools, in which I daily read
> With most delight the passions of mankind,
> Whether by words, looks, sighs, or tears revealed;
> There saw into the depth of human souls,
> Souls that appear to have no depth at all
> To careless eyes. And—now convinced at heart
> How little those formalities, to which
> With over-weening trust alone we give
> The name of Education, have to do
> With real feeling and just sense; how vain
> A correspondence with the talking world
> Proves to the most; and called to make good search
> If man's estate, by doom of Nature yoked
> With toil, be therefore yoked with ignorance;
> If virtue be indeed so hard to rear
> And intellectual strength so rare a boon—
> I prized such walks still more.

Those formalities: the charge lies in these two words. Education, we are to understand, had gradually been narrowed down till it was not only limited to a small section of the population, but was rather an accomplishment, a mere elegancy, than a development of character or a training for a life of any public utility. Wordsworth's opinion is that it had become a kind of intellectual full dress, as conven-

tional as any fashionable clothes, and unworthy of the name of education. This opinion it is possible to examine with some certainty, for it was made in circumstances well known to us. The poem in which it is expressed was begun in 1799 and finished in 1805. The passages which concern us now are to be found in the last few pages of it: that is to say, they were written at a time when this country was putting forth her powers, military, intellectual, and moral, in a world-wide struggle, and at their highest pitch. The end was not yet in sight, but the success already won against superior force was in itself a sufficient answer to any merely carping criticism. It was not then with the practical or scientific training of his countrymen that Wordsworth was finding fault. The schools of the day escaped his criticism on that side, for they did not attempt to teach any kind of science except grammar, the rudimentary science of language. It was, therefore, on the side of the humanities that he thought them insufficient. It was a small class only that received "the education of a gentleman," a smaller still that achieved any familiarity with the Classics; and even these few felt little of the effect of great literature. What they got was a knack of turning a sentence, a stock of imposing allusions to the names and stories of antiquity, and the power of pointing a speech with an apt line or two from Horace. Into such "formalities" as these had the teaching of Latin and Greek degenerated, according to Wordsworth's evidence; and we may accept it as serious, for he had himself received a

Classical education, and loved the Classics in spite of it.

What, then, was the remedy to which he turned? Did he advocate a different use of Homer and Horace, of Sophocles and Seneca—or even a return to the Aristotelian Ethics or Plato's ideals of Education? He did not: the line he took was not that of Reform but of Revolt: he threw both Antiquity and Authority overboard, and went elsewhere for what he needed. He went, as we have seen, to the common highways where he could meet his fellows, hear of the passions of mankind, the real feeling and just sense, and where he hoped to find evidence that virtue and intellectual strength were not incompatible with the life of a working man of any degree.

It is notable that although his revolt is a general one, against a whole system, he does not suggest that all who suffer from it should follow him out to the open road. It is to be his part to learn from human nature face to face, and then to pass on his acquired wisdom to the world. Having bent in reverence to Nature, and to men, "as they are men within themselves,"

> Of these, said I, shall be my song; of these . . .
> Will I record the praises, making verse
> Deal boldly with substantial things; in truth
> And sanctity of passion, speak of these,
> That justice may be done, obeisance paid
> Where it is due: thus haply shall I teach,
> Inspire: through unadulterated ears
> Pour rapture, tenderness, and hope—my theme
> No other than the very heart of man . . .

> Sorrow that is not sorrow, but delight;
> And miserable love, that is not pain
> To hear of, for the glory that redounds
> Therefrom to human kind, and what we are.

In this remarkable plan of Wordsworth's for educating his fellows there are two more points which deserve illustrating from this poem. One is that although the method proposed is literary, it is not bookish. Wordsworth was not over fond of books: he prefers the men who live

> Not uninformed by books, good books, though few,
> In Nature's presence.

and he also says

> Yes, in those wanderings deeply did I feel
> How we mislead each other: above all
> How books mislead us, seeking their reward
> From judgements of the wealthy Few, who see
> By artificial lights: how they debase
> The Many for the pleasures of those Few:
> Effeminately level down the truth
> To certain general notions, for the sake
> Of being understood at once, or else
> Through want of better knowledge in the heads
> That framed them: flattering self-conceit with words
> That while they most ambitiously set forth
> Extrinsic differences, the outward marks
> Whereby Society has parted man
> From man, neglect the universal heart.

This gives us a good general idea of the lines upon which he would have reviewed books—he would have

approved the novel of sentiment rather than the novel of manners, he would certainly have preferred Charlotte Brontë to Jane Austen, Thackeray to Peacock, and Hardy to everybody else. It also shows that he would have been in all cases a severe critic. But he has fortunately left us in no doubt as to his appreciation of romance: he regarded it as naturally desirable and akin to poetry.

> A gracious spirit o'er the earth presides
> And o'er the heart of man: invisibly
> It comes, to works of unreproved delight
> And tendency benign, directing those
> Who care not, know not, think not what they do.
> The tales that charm away the wakeful night
> In Araby, romances: legends penned
> For solace, by dim light of monkish lamps:
> Fictions for ladies of their love, devised
> By youthful squires: adventures endless, spun
> By the dismantled warrior in old age
> Out of the bowels of those very schemes
> In which his youth did first extravagate:
> These spread like day, and something in the shape
> Of these will live till man shall be no more.

The reason given for this eternal persistence of romance is interesting:

> Dumb yearnings, hidden appetites, are ours,
> And *they must* have their food.

Especially is this so when the child is growing up into an uncongenial world, uneasy and unsettled, not yet tamed and humbled down to the yoke of custom:

> Oh! then we feel we feel
> We know where we have friends—Ye dreamers, then,
> Forgers of daring tales! we bless you then,
> Impostors, drivellers, dotards, as the ape
> Philosophy will call you, *then* we feel
> With what and how great might ye are in league,
> Who make our wish our power, our thought a deed,
> An empire, a possession.

From this it is but a short step to the

> Knowledge and increase of enduring joy
> From the great Nature that exists in works
> Of mighty Poets. Visionary power
> Attends the motions of the viewless winds
> Embodied in the mystery of words:
> There darkness makes abode, and all the host
> Of shadowy things work endless changes—there
> As in a mansion like their proper home,
> Even forms and substances are circumfused
> By that transparent veil with light divine,
> And through the turnings intricate of verse
> Present themselves as objects recognised
> In flashes, and with glory not their own.

Those who love poetry, and have thought upon it, will recognise in these passages, and especially in the one last read, so much evidence of deep thought, of a profound insight into the nature of the creative power from which all art proceeds, that they will not expect to hear them dealt with now in detail. It must be enough for us to mark the points upon which we summoned Wordsworth to speak, and pass on. His views are not entirely co-ordinated, or even thought out on scientific lines: they are rather a set

of feelings, doubly his own by nature and by experience. They may be put down just as they occur, for they belong to and must eventually be fitted into a scheme which had not been imagined by Wordsworth or his contemporaries, and which even among ourselves had not yet been agreed upon. He thought then, that the Classics, as taught in his time, were worthless for education: that books in general came under the same condemnation, because they did not record or foster true feeling or knowledge of human nature: that human nature could be best studied in the largest and least sophisticated masses of men: that the lessons to be learned from it could best be gathered in and delivered to the young by poets and romancers: that the poet especially has this power because he can create a "great Nature" by the mystery of words, a new world in which things are presented as objects recognised, but in flashes and with glory not their own. Lastly it is noteworthy that the poets whom he had in mind were not ancient poets but modern ones; even, it would appear, poets of the same age and country as those whom they are to teach.

Now, there can be no doubt that some if not all of these opinions would have been hotly contested by his contemporaries, and there will probably be many now living who are convinced that our great-grandfathers' education was far better than Wordsworth knew. We need not enter upon this controversy, for the importance of Wordsworth's view for us lies not in its particular but in its universal aspect.

His principles have a value, whether his estimate was just or unjust: and that value remains to our own day, when all the conditions are changed.

It is this change of which we have now to take account: a change which, in 1805, was already in preparation, but apparently not yet in the least realised. It can hardly be said that science was unknown, for there existed on the one hand a number of men who loved knowledge of the material world and followed several lines of research under the name of natural philosophy: on the other hand the practical problems of construction, transport, and manufacture were being solved with increasing success. But an advance on either of these two lines, the theoretical and the practical, was regarded rather as a discovery, a find in an unknown country, than as a step towards conquest of the whole known world. Life was being made more interesting and more comfortable, but the two processes had not yet been seen to be parts of a vastly greater change, that change by which man now sees himself to be no longer the almost helpless sport of natural forces, but the inheritor of powers by which he may before long master and direct them. The immense importance of this change, as Sir Ray Lankester pointed out in his famous Oxford address, lies not only in the fact of man's approaching mastery of the material world, but even more in his consciousness of his new position. We no longer explore, we organise: we think in world terms, and consider no problem satisfactorily stated unless all the possible factors are included: we

no longer suffer evolution, we direct it: we see in a new light man's position in the world of nature, and his relation to his fellow men. We even change our religion, for though we may retain our creed, it is the creed of a changed mind.

To a well-informed and unprejudiced observer nothing could seem more obvious than that a change of this magnitude must involve a change in our methods of education. But there are, for various reasons, comparatively few observers who are both well informed and unprejudiced. Over hardly any other subject is there seething and swirling such a welter of stormy feeling and confused thought. The tumult is set in motion from the scientific side, but not by a single current, or even by two. The appeal of the leaders of scientific thought is accompanied by the outcry of those who are merely impressed by the practical results of science, and desire no education that is not concerned with material things. A still lower class measure education by its bearing upon commercial success: and to these must be added those who have suffered from a lifelong feeling of inferiority and would, they imagine, be in some way bettered by a turn of the tables. From the opposite direction come equally strong appeals: first that of the true Humanists, to whom we should do well to listen. But these labour under a special difficulty. The separation between the Classics and Science has been so complete that the competent scholar rarely has any familiarity with scientific ideas. He knows how much he owes to the Classics, and he does not believe

that he could have got the same or any equivalent advantage from Science. The value of his opinion is diminished then by his one-sidedness: and it is too often still further diminished by the fact that he is, in many cases, a tradesman and his scholarship his only stock in trade. He cannot see that it *may* be an undesirable stock in trade, and is certainly one for which at present there is only a forced demand. Many a scholar at our Universities may be not unjustly described as one who is buying the Classics in order to sell them compulsorily to the next generation, that they may do the same in turn: and yet he does not like to hear this system described as a vicious circle. If, again, we look at those who have done well in the Classics, and yet do not make their living by them, we shall find that they have either neglected their Latin and Greek in later life, or kept them up as an amusement, or a kind of freemasonry. The amusement is a pleasant one: the sense of privilege is also agreeable to many who seek no other distinction: but such considerations are out of date in a discussion on education. The scholar, then, does not make a very impressive witness, but he has two really good points—the value of literature as mental experience, and the value of language as mental gymnastic—and though he may make too sure of his system being the only trustworthy one, he has at any rate the advantage of being able to point to a long and not wholly disastrous past, while the alternative method must, he urges, be an experiment.

We need not stay to complete this list of the various

points of view from which the subject is being debated: we have gone, perhaps, far enough to establish the fact that there is something like a chaos of opinions. Moreover, even those who have good evidence to give use it as an argument and not as evidence—disputatiously and not scientifically. The argument from the past is a striking example of this: the classicists point to all that is satisfactory in our public services, the scientists to all that is unsatisfactory: both assert that this state of things, good or bad, is due to our system of education. Both are here guilty of a common fallacy: they forget that a result may have more causes than one. Training is not the only force which affects development. But let us grant that in the development of character and ability education is the most important of the forces at work: we may still be the victims of another fallacy, that is, another failure in scientific thought. Education is a word which is capable of being used in two meanings, and is, in fact, so used unconsciously in this debate. Broadly, it means the process by which man's powers are "brought out" or developed, and includes, or should include, all the influences which life brings to bear upon him. But narrowly, and especially in the present chaotic dispute, it is used as almost equivalent to "curriculum" and includes nothing beyond the influences of school and schoolmasters. I hasten to add that schoolmasters are less often guilty of this fallacy than any other class of men: they realise better than most the difference between instruction and education. But they should realise also that

they are themselves doing more for their pupils out of school than in school. Their error lies in their blind submission to an impossible system. They rely not so much upon themselves as upon their subject: and this subject they misuse, under orders from above. It would be incredible if it were not a fact centuries old, that the most beautiful and revered works of antiquity, those which you maintain to be unmatched for the strengthening and ennobling of the mind in youth, even those you tear to pieces and defile daily as grammatical exercises. Take your finest marble statue, break it up and give the pieces to your boys to be thrown about in their gymnastic training: when their muscles have developed sufficiently you may hope to put it together again, clean it and set it up for their æsthetic education, but you will be doing a foolish thing. Of your hundred boys, ninety-seven will have left you before the final stage—they are not taking an æsthetic education. Of the remaining three, two will regret that you have spoiled for them a beauty which they would otherwise have enjoyed: the hundredth will be the one fortunate enough to be born with the gift for language—grammatical exercises will have cost him no effort, and his delight in beauty will neither have been inspired nor injured by you.

Let us now state as briefly as possible what we expect or desire from education, and compare with this the results which we have obtained in the past, and those which we may look for in the future under a reformed system.

Every one I imagine will agree that the object of education is to fit men for life. But life is a highly complex activity and needs many kinds of fitness. As to the relative value of these there is, of course, a natural and fundamental difference of belief among men: but in whatever order they may be placed, it must always be agreed that the intellectual, the æsthetic, and the moral activities of the human spirit should be all trained and stimulated. Science is the province of the intellect, Art of the æsthetic power, and Conduct of the moral sense: we live not in any one of these provinces but in the united kingdom of all three, and we warp and deform ourselves if we try to lead a separate existence within the boundaries of one only. The three natural affections of the human spirit are the love of truth, the love of beauty, and the love of righteousness: man loves all these by nature, for their own sake, and no system of education can claim to be adequate if it does not help him to develop these natural and disinterested loves. Further, I think every one would, upon reflection, agree that on all these three sides the first necessity is to secure clearness of vision. "A haziness of intellectual vision," said Cardinal Newman, "is the malady of all classes of men by nature . . . of all who have not had a really good education." I have before pointed out that haziness of æsthetic vision is equally fatal to the artist or poet. If he cannot clearly seize the subject of his intuition he cannot express or recreate it in lines of beauty: the more hazy his perception, the more inferior his style will be. "Quand on se con-

tente," says Joubert, "de comprendre à demi, on se contente aussi d'exprimer à demi, et alors on écrit facilement." I need not add that to write with facility is to write badly. All great art is difficult—as difficult as it is rare. So is great morality, and it, too, depends fundamentally upon clearness of vision. It may be said of Shakespeare, in answer to those who deplore his conduct, that he unquestionably had this clearness of vision; he could not always govern his impulses, but he never gave a false account of them.

Again, I think that we might all be agreed upon the necessity of mental freedom and an abundance of ideas. Not only men of science but poets have felt this necessity. Matthew Arnold, breathing with difficulty the air of the Victorian world, longed for that of the great ages of literature. "In the Greece of Pindar and Sophocles, the England of William Shakespeare, the poet lived in a current of ideas in the highest degree animating and nourishing to the creative powers: society was permeated by fresh thought, intelligent and alive . . . all the books in the world are only valuable as they are helps to this." But he admits that they *are* useful. "Books and reading may enable men to create a kind of semblance of it in their own minds, a world of knowledge and intelligence wherein they may live and work." It is true that in his own day Matthew Arnold despaired of finding sympathy for his ideas. "The notion of the free play of mind on all subjects being a pleasure in itself . . . an essential provider of elements with-

out which a nation's spirit . . . must in the long run die of inanition—this hardly enters an Englishman's head." In this respect we are not now as we were: it has entered the heads of so many Englishmen to desire this free play of mind that if all the good heads were laid together instead of being knocked against one another, we should easily be saved from the inanition we dread. And this suggests one more desideratum in education—the spread of a wider sense of common life and common effort than we have yet experienced.

Let us now take stock of our past and see how we stand with regard to these elements of training for life, and what is the value of the offers made to us from different quarters. First, that clearness of vision which we all believe to be so vitally necessary is in its very nature scientific. It is scientific not only when it is shown in the measurements and comparisons of material substances, but when it is found in art and morals. In morals it is moral because it makes measurements and comparisons of conduct, and becomes justice, tolerance, scrupulousness or self-restraint. In poetry it appears as that "fundamental brainwork" which, as Rossetti said, "makes the difference in all art." It even provides the indispensable raw material of poetry, as I have shown elsewhere, the very substance which by transmutation is to become a new and less perishable world. In the broadest sense then we have always lived by the help of science, and the more we have sought that help the finer has been our life.

What now of the freedom and flow of ideas? Under what system is that likely to be stimulated and kept up? What is the evidence which has come down to us from the past? Have vitalising ideas been most often generated and distributed by authority or by experiment—by transmission from greater predecessors or by the increased vigour and variety of contemporary life? No doubt they have come from both sources. It is generally agreed that the actual power of the human intellect has not increased since the time of Plato, and that the rediscovery of the Greek writers poured a tide of new ideas into the brain of the Middle Ages. On the other hand it does not appear that books were ever the only motive force in an age of intellectual expansion. Matthew Arnold possibly thought so: he speaks with regret of the Greece of Sophocles, the England of Shakespeare. But he might with equal truth have spoken of the Greece of the Ionic Confederacy and the England of the Merchant Venturers: for these were periods in which political and commercial enterprise were at as high a tide as literature. So, too, was scientific thought: for Aristotle lived in the same century with the Greek tragedians, and while Shakespeare was writing plays, Bacon was protesting in the *Novum Organum* against the everlasting distillation of ideas from ideas, and advocating a return to experiment as the true method of science.

The recollection of Bacon's work may act as a warning to us: we must not repeat in our education the mistake against which he protested, the mistake

of trying to live on ideas detached from experience. We may get our ideas from literature or from science, but we must get them living. Our education must not be too abstract, it must be drawn from that life which it is to teach. The paradox is a perfectly intelligible one—we must learn to swim before we can be safe in the water, but also we must enter the water if we are to learn to swim. The knowledge of the world which is desired to fit us for life is twofold—a knowledge of men and a knowledge of things. Hitherto the first of these two has been our chief care, and in this respect we Britons have no reason to reproach ourselves. From time to time both our enemies and our allies have admired the results of our system: our people have been described as the only grown-up nation in Europe, the only nation with a genius for politics—that is, for life in a great society. Our leading classes have been able and ready to lead, wherever the qualities required have been qualities of character. It is not here but on the scientific side, the methodical and intellectual side, that we have shown inferiority, that we have even, it would seem, preferred inferiority. The danger of the present situation lies precisely in the fact that we have been strong on one side and weak on the other: there would be less partisanship if we had done badly all round. It will be a disaster if the literary education is entirely ousted by the scientific: it will be a still greater disaster if the demands of the friends of science are repelled. First, because they are right in saying that to deal with humanity only and not with the material

world is impossible, and that we cannot live the life of man as he now is without learning to understand better his physical conditions and opportunities. Time must be made for this study, and that means that the time-table must be shared more equally between science and literature. The advantages offered in return for this sacrifice have been admirably stated by the Poet Laureate in a recent speech. "We have no wish to exclude the humanistic side of learning, with its necessary study of Greek. Those who most value that are too well aware of its advantages to fear that its serious study can ever be supplanted. But for the ordinary schoolboy, natural science has one great superiority, which is this, that whereas the grammatical rudiments of Greek are of no value—above other grammatical rudiments—except as a key to Greek style and thought, so that a boy who learns them imperfectly or never gets beyond them, gains nothing from them and is never likely to make any use of them whatever; on the other hand, the rudiments of natural science are in and for themselves rewarding, and in all its stages this learning is of value to a man, for it tells of the things among which he must pass his life and is a constant source of intellectual pleasure and of usefulness, and it is the living grammar of the universe, without which no man can ever hope to read in its full significance the epic of his spiritual experience."

Mr. Bridges prefaces this with a warning against the mischief which might be done by preachers of dogmatic materialism. As to this we must hope that

the leaders of scientific thought will prevent the establishment of a Church of Science with a new orthodoxy of consecrated hypotheses based on a partial survey of the evidence. Another warning he might have added, against expecting—with Science any more than with the Classics—good results from bad teaching. If the rudiments of science are taught as a mass of uncoordinated facts, and not as the data of great generalisations, they will prove as useless as the rudiments of Greek. But if they are so taught as to give the student a glimpse of the passion for truth, the sense of fellowship, and the disinterestedness, which are the cause and the accompaniment of true scientific work, then I think Mr. Bridges has even understated his case. We shall not go far in the study of any science without gaining from it something more than the promised reward of knowledge and efficiency. In itself, science is bound by nature to be emotionless, impartial, prosaic. But, in fact, its high laws cannot long be contemplated without irresistible emotion. If Beauty is Truth, so is Truth Beauty. We need not ask why: but the passion for truth of reason in the material world is not far removed from the passion for truth of feeling in those other worlds of art and conduct. It will stir men to the same sacrifice, and reward them with the same spiritual peace. Let us welcome science then, and give up the hours that are necessary: with those that remain to literature we can still do better than we have done in the past. Even for its own sake our literary education has hitherto had too much time allotted to it. With all the

term before them, our teachers have laboured too slowly and too heavily. No poem, no history, however fine, will stand being read so many hours a week for thirteen weeks. Even a promising pupil, who began the term with a certain appetite for the new book, is sick with indigestion before the end and looks back with disgust on the process by which his food has been chopped small into a kind of intellectual force-meat. With what a different heart does he devour Homer or Virgil or Cicero's Letters, if some more humane master offer to read them with him out of hours! It is a real experience of life, for he is at the same moment in contact with two characters of men—tangible in the style of the one and the comments and preferences of the other. There is nothing wanting, for the author has been understood; and nothing that can be lost, for the touches of character make impressions that are deeper than memory. If we give up half the week to science, we can perhaps no longer afford to teach literature as grammar or as archæology, but we shall still have ample time to teach it as literature. We need not despair because we cannot teach it all: the years of youth never did suffice for any complete study, and they never will. It is not even to be regretted: as Anatole France has said, "Ne vous flattez pas d'enseigner un grand nombre de choses . . . mettez l'étincelle aux esprits. D'eux mêmes ils s'éprendront par l'endroit où ils sont sensibles."

Here, then, is something to aim at: by putting the spark to these young spirits, which are, after all, in-

flammable enough by nature, we can give them the chance of catching fire, here or there. But if it proves to be literature that fires them, we can do more than that. Literary art is not a method of decoration, it is a method of expression: to read poetry is to come in contact not with a pattern but with a personality, to be taken into a living world. Into such a world, if a young reader once fairly enters, he cannot come out of it without change, if indeed he can ever come out of it entirely. And when he has undergone the transforming influence of the greatest art of his own country, still further changes of the same kind are open to him—he can enter into the literature of other countries and undergo the magic of words that are not his own natural inheritance. The value claimed by the Classicists for Latin and Greek is a real value, but it is one which does not exceed that which is to be got from the best modern languages. In the literature of France, Italy, Spain, or Russia, we may become familiar not merely with new thoughts, but with new forms of thought. The Scottish, Welsh, and Irish are right to preserve their own tongues: these are no small part of their national character, and by the power to think in two languages they are our superiors. Not only is the mind improved as an instrument, it is in a sense enriched or doubled. "When I learn a new language," said the Emperor Charles, "I seem to acquire another soul." At the least we may hope to acquire touch with another soul, the soul of one of the neighbors with whom our national life must bring us into contact. The Roman soul and the ancient

Greek soul are good for us too, but it would be difficult in the present state of civilisation to claim for them an equal importance, for we do not share an armed world with them.

I am not now speaking of grammar—that is a branch of science and must take its chance with other sciences. I am only thinking of literature, of poetry, and of the manner in which it may be used. The difficulty will be first to persuade those in authority that poetry is the record of man's most vital experience: and that this is as true now as it was in Virgil's time. Secondly it will be hard to persuade them that the teacher must be allowed to impart his author and himself, without mangling or dissecting too closely the written word, and without shrinking from any question raised by the reading. We and our predecessors were confused and misled in boyhood by the shamefaced select editions of Ovid, Horace, and Martial which were put before us as the works of great men. The rest of them we read for ourselves, but could not ask what we were to think of the grossness, the cynicism, and the cruelty there displayed. If the same system is to be followed with Chaucer and Shakespeare, the confusion will be worse still: the boys who read them without frank guidance in their most impressionable years will lose the incomparable lesson of their human infirmity and their superhuman nobility. Finally the method of examination must be changed: if scraps of archæology and grammar have not been crammed into the pupil, obviously they cannot be demanded of him. He must be

asked such reasonable questions as might occur in conversation upon the subject, between two intelligent and interested talkers, and he must be classed according as he answers them in his own way, with understanding and sincerity. No boy who can read a poem with pleasure is too young to be asked what he thinks of it: the spiritual experiences of the young are often not less but more keen than those of their elders.

The scheme which I have faintly outlined may prove to be unacceptable to those in authority—those who rivet the chains of education upon our schools. If so, we who are not in authority must do our best to correct and supplement a defective system. By all means in our power we must see that the generations which are to be touched by the great scientific minds shall be touched also by the great creative minds. They must have the poets brought to them, and brought by those who will speak of them as they are. It is not difficult to imagine an edition of the English poets for boys, which would be as willingly read out of school as any Greek or Latin author in the classroom. This would be near to the fulfilment of Wordsworth's plan, and that is saying a great thing in its favour, for no one has ever better understood the nature and value of poetry than Wordsworth, or spoken more clearly of it in verse and prose. One passage in its best-known essay is extraordinarily appropriate to our present position and the subject before us. "Poetry," he has said, "is the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge: it is the impassioned expression which is in the countenance of all Science,

. . . In spite of difference of soil and climate, of language and manners, of laws and customs—in spite of things gone silently out of mind, and things violently destroyed, the poet binds together by passion and knowledge the vast empire of human society, as it is spread over the whole earth and over all time. . . . Poetry is the first and last of all knowledge—it is as immortal as the heart of man."

XII

THE POET AND HIS AUDIENCE

The track of thought which I am about to follow started originally from a conversation on Shakespeare. It was impressed upon me by a very distinguished poet that in the plays, and especially in the comedies, there are passages which offend and must always have offended against good taste. The accusation was based, not upon a conventional standard of taste, but upon a true one. It was not merely that certain scenes and dialogues are at variance with our present notions of decorum, but that they could only be acceptable, or even tolerable, to a nature lacking in sensibility. There could be clearly no question of Shakespeare's own sensibility: the painful inference was that in these scenes he was violating his own nature in response to a demand from outside, that he was, in fact, playing down to the lowest section of his audience.

The example chiefly discussed on that occasion was the fifth act of *Measure for Measure,* and it is certainly a striking one. The plot, it will be remembered, is wound up by the arrangement of no less than four marriages, two voluntary and natural, two compulsory and penal. One of these last, the marriage of

Angelo and Mariana, important persons in the story, is not only repulsive, but it is repulsive in exactly the degree in which the play is successful in exhibiting the character of Angelo as a villain past hope. We have known other characters in these plays who have done wrong and yet have been forgiven without too much violence to our feelings. Leontes, the jealous and tyrannical husband in the *Winter's Tale;* Oliver, the murderously cruel brother in *As You Like It;* Proteus, the treacherous friend and lover in *Two Gentlemen of Verona*—the conversion of these we are just able to accept as a return to their better selves. But Angelo, as he is shown to us in this play, is an unmixed character; he has no better self: it is not his crimes only that are held up to our detestation, but his whole nature. "This outward-sainted Deputy . . . is yet a devil." "They say this Angelo was not made by man and woman, after the downright way of creation"—he is at once both cold and sensual, hypocritical and cruel. His course of action, when he is raised to power for a short time by the Duke's supposed absence, proves his natural vileness and forms the basis of the plot. He is defeated by means of the lady to whom he had been betrothed five years before, but whom he had repudiated upon the loss of her dowry. She is a slight but singularly romantic figure, Mariana of the Moated Grange. Shakespeare introduces her with one of his most exquisite songs, and unquestionably means her to engage our sympathies. Yet in the end he pairs her off with Angelo, telling us that she "hath yet in her the continuance

of her first affection: his unjust unkindness, that in all reason should have quenched her love, hath, like an impediment in the current, made it more violent and unruly."

This is natural enough, even sympathetic. But that unjust unkindness of five years ago has been followed by a far more hideous exposure: Angelo has shown himself in the course of the play to be a monster of vice and cruelty. It could only be for a thoughtless, unfeeling audience, not for Shakespeare himself, that such a union could furnish a "happy ending."

Such was the indictment, and I remember that I found it hard to answer. But the substance of it was afterwards published, and called forth a reply from an eminent Shakesperian critic. The line of defence adopted was to account for Shakespeare's bad taste by making it a part of the bad taste of his age. To the Elizabethans a coarse tone in conversation and vulgar endings in plots were not repugnant as they are to us: Shakespeare was an Elizabethan, therefore these things were not repugnant to him. There is some truth in this, and so far as the coarseness of language is concerned the answer may be accepted. Plainness of speech is not contrary to nature; it is only contrary to decorum, and the standard of decorum does vary as the generations pass. But feeling is a different matter: no fashion or convention can make unkindness kind or brutality the same thing as good taste. It is in this respect, if in any, that Shakespeare was not of an age but for all time: we can hardly foresee the generations when his work will be, in delicacy,

of feeling, below the standard then recognised among good men.

This, however, if my memory is accurate, was the general tenor of the reply.

The resultant feeling in my own mind is one to which both disputants have contributed. It is plain that Shakespeare who constantly shows himself moved by great subtlety and great depth of feeling, at certain points will write in disregard of such feeling, and will even patch his plot with work upon a lower level. On the other hand, I see no reason to believe that when he did this he was consciously stooping, or that he was deliberately supplying a demand. The attitude of a storyteller to his audience is primarily sympathetic, not commercial: his true intent is all for their delight, and that intent will lead him to seek at particular moments for the mood or the preference which is in common between him and them, rather than for one which would mark a difference. His desire and theirs is that the story should be kept going, and in the end finished with a word of consolation.

No doubt this is far from the view of Shakespeare held up to us by some of his commentators. Mr. Masefield, in his brilliant little book, often writes of the plays as if they were deliberately intended to illustrate certain preconceived ideas. For him the "subject" of each play is not a story or a character, but an abstract idea or doctrine; he even goes so far as to speak of Shakespeare's "scheme," and of his "resolve to do not 'the nearest thing,' precious to human sheep,

but the difficult, new, and noble thing glimmering beyond his mind."

This would seem to exclude all expressions of less elevated moods, and all considerations of an inferior audience. But Mr. Masefield makes two admissions. He divides Shakespeare's life as a playwright into two periods; in the first of which "he had worked out his natural instincts, the life known to him, his predilections, his reading." In the second period he became a conscious master, visionary and supreme. Perhaps it was only in his immature days that he sometimes wrote below himself. But, it is unfortunately in the supreme period that *Measure for Measure* was written—Mr. Masefield himself believes it to be later than *Julius Cæsar* and *Hamlet*—so that here the possibility of an agreement is offered only to be taken from us again.

The second admission is more hopeful. We are reminded that the plays of Shakespeare were constructed closely and carefully to be effective on the Elizabethan stage, which was much unlike our own, and that "on that stage they were highly and nobly effective." This is the line followed so indefatigably by Mrs. Stopes in her researches. From the first she devoted herself to facts, and at once perceived that the determining elements of Shakespeare's method in writing a play included not only his own intuition, but five extraneous facts, all of which had to be considered, namely, his original in history or fiction, his stage, his actors, the Censor, and the audience. The effect of the first four of these is easy to determine:

the original story, whether in Holinshed or Cinthio or elsewhere, was the prime element, the source of the impression, which his spirit seized upon; it was also, in so far as he felt compelled or tempted to follow it accurately, a limitation of his freedom. The individual qualities of the actors for whom he wrote were limitations, too, but they were also, no doubt, stimulating and suggestive influences. The stage has its own necessities, but these would be soon mastered and instinctively met: the Censor alone must always have been an incalculable and exasperating obstacle. Lastly, the position of the audience remains to be considered, and I think we may profitably spend more time upon it.

The question to which a single play has led us is one which concerns not only the drama, but every kind of poetry and beyond that again the whole range of the arts. Whether it is a poem or a picture, a statue or a sonata, the concrete work of art has always borne a double aspect, and has for long been the subject of misunderstanding and of controversy. To the majority of the world, and especially to the dilettante, amateur, or art-lover, as he has at different times been called, the work of art is a thing made by the artist in accordance with the laws of beauty and for the pleasure of others. The laws of beauty being nowhere accessible for reference, there will often be a difference between the artist and his audience; the work of art may not be well received. Who is to decide the difference? Not the artist, for he is only on trial, he is the offerer of the goods, the candidate

for favour: nor the generality of the audience, for they are inferior in taste. The dilettante then steps forward and gives judgment; taking for this purpose the title of connoisseur, or πεπαιδευμένος, the cultivated person, the one who knows. If the work of art gives pleasure to him it has passed the standard; it is artistic and should be accepted.

This theory has had a great following, but it has not been found to hold good in practice. The despised majority see, to their consolation, that the infallible connoisseurs have not been agreed among themselves; even among the πεπαιδευμένοι the passage of time works remarkable changes in taste. The awards of merit made by Dr. Johnson and Sir Joshua Reynolds are not endorsed by the critics or art lovers of to-day. Seeing this division among their opponents the friends of the artist have put forward a rival theory. They claim that as art is the expression of the artist's intuition, he alone can judge of the success or failure of his own works of art, because he alone knows how far the expression is complete. They press the claim to the extreme; they maintain that it is of no importance whether the subject of a work of art be noble or base, pleasing or unpleasing; beauty they define as "successful expression" and ugliness as "unsuccessful expression." In their view of art there is no place at all for an audience in the ordinary sense of the word; the artist is the creator, and the rest of mankind receive his creations as they receive a sunset or a snowstorm. Works of art are for the world simply phenomena, and it is no concern of the artist to take

account of the effect they produce, whether that effect be one of pleasure, of discomfort, or of demoralisation.

Those who hold this view will rely on Benedetto Croce for the best exposition of it. He has shown with great clearness, and, I think, quite convincingly, what is the scientific account of the process by which a work of art comes into being. The artist receives an impression from the outer world; by the æsthetic activity of his spirit he seizes it and recreates it for himself, forming thereby a new world, which has never before existed, for it is his own and no one else's. So far we are all artists—every day we grasp impressions in this way; but we say nothing of them, we leave them unuttered and forget them. The artist more properly so-called goes a step further: in stone, in colour, in music, or in words he externalises his intuition, he makes a work of art. It is easy to see that various questions about the audience only arise when this third stage is reached; for example, even the Censor could not say that a play was immoral if it was not published, or even reduced to writing. In short, Croce demonstrates that art is in itself independent of morality, and can only come under the moralist's survey when by publication it is carried into the sphere of conduct. And whatever may be the result in that sphere, the artist is not thereby made moral or immoral, for his object was to express himself and not to influence others.

There Croce breaks off—unfortunately for us—because the relation of art and morality is not yet under-

stood in this country, and because if he had gone further he might have made an observation which would have helped my argument. He might have considered the process by which a work of art may affect conduct. As I have said in a former discourse, it is not by the use of strong language, or by the narrating of immoral acts that conduct is influenced. The effect of these on a reader is simply to increase his knowledge, to add to his experience. Fresh experience, it is true, may bring fresh temptations, and this is why authority always dreads fresh experience for those under its charge—the balance of order may be upset. But, as Thomas à Kempis says, temptations do not make a man bad, they only reveal what he is. The man who stole Leonardo's "Monna Lisa" from the Louvre was probably not tempted to that crime by reading Pater's wonderful recreation of the picture; and if he was he must have been a criminal already. Many a man has thrown away his happiness and his fortune upon the wrong woman; but few are known to have done so under the influence of Tennyson's poem on Guinevere:

> A man had given all other bliss,
> And all his worldly wealth for this,
> To waste his whole heart in one kiss
> Upon her perfect lips.

No; what is really infecting is an infected atmosphere; the Censor wastes his time in striking out an indecorous word or scene in a play. It is not indecorum which is harmful, but contact with a base or

vulgar mind; and the vulgarity of an author is dangerous in every page of his work. So, too, with the great artists; it is their contact which ennobles; the man who has once known them is changed in growth and power, not by any words of precept or exhortation, but merely by breathing the ampler air of the worlds which they have created and laid open to us. These effects are profoundly important, and they are inevitable; for they arise from the nature of man, and they cannot be effectively controlled. You cannot legislate against the arts; it is only from imaginary republics that the poets are expelled with honour.

I have now gone beyond Croce, and I am going yet a step further—I am going to cast doubt upon the whole theory of the artist's complete separation from his audience. We are all agreed upon one point, one stage in the artistic process; it is for his own satisfaction, it is to fulfil his own nature that the artist seizes an impression and re-presents it to himself. We see John Keats sitting by the fireside, dreaming over the story of a winter's night in the old world:

> St. Agnes' Eve—ah! bitter chill it was!
> The owl, for all his feathers, was a-cold;
> The hare limp'd trembling through the frozen grass,
> And silent was the flock in woolly fold:
> Numb were the Beadsman's fingers, while he told
> His rosary, and while his frosted breath,
> Like pious incense from a censer old,
> Seem'd taking flight for heaven, without a death,
> Past the sweet Virgin's picture, while his prayer he saith.

We are agreed about this; we know it is not for us that this boy of twenty-three is dreaming, creating: it is for himself that he is making that picture and that serene music, and if death had taken him on the instant, the act of creation would none the less have been a fulfilment, the achievement of an end in itself. But he had, it seems, more time before him, and a further end in view. We see him take pen and paper, we see him record the dream, externalise the expression; still later, when he has contended successfully with publishers and printers, we see the work of art given to the world, to all readers present or to come. What is his motive now? What is his spirit driving him to achieve? Why cannot he be content to make his world for himself and live in it, careless of mankind? By the publication of his poem he cannot expect to gain even an increase of material comfort or of social consideration. What is left? "Fame" will no doubt be the answer: and what is Fame? It is something independent of time and space, it is wide and lasting repute—for an artist it is the repute of having recreated life under such an aspect that great numbers of his fellow-men will enter his new world with sympathy—that is, with common admiration—and with gratitude—that is, with a feeling of obligation to the giver. But sympathy and gratitude are personal relations; the poet's motive, therefore, in publishing his poems is a desire for personal relations with numbers of his fellow-men—in short, with an audience.

I have come, then, to this conclusion: that while

artistic expression is for the artist an end in itself, the externalisation of his expression—that is, the making of a visible or audible work of art—has a different motive, a sympathetic motive, implying an audience. If any one desire to maintain that this is not a true account, let us make the attempt to follow him. Let us imagine the artist placed upon a solitary island, well supplied with all the necessaries of physical life and able to obey without hindrance the æsthetic activity of his spirit. Let us go further, and imagine him not only deprived of an actual audience, but even of a potential audience; he must not be influenced by any remembrance of the world of men, or any habit of mind acquired there; he must not be moved by any expectation of a return to it. The whole social life of man must be blotted out from his consciousness. In such a case we can imagine him to retain at any rate his joy in physical well-being and in the beauty of nature. Like Enoch Arden he may see every day—

> The sunrise broken into scarlet shafts
> Among the palms and ferns and precipices;
> The blaze upon the waters to the East;
> The blaze upon his island overhead;
> The blaze upon the waters to the West;
> Then the great stars that globe themselves in Heaven,
> The hollower-bellowing Ocean, and again
> The scarlet shafts of Sunrise—but no sail.

But no sail; and with no sail, no memory or hope of a sail, does it seem reasonable to believe that he

would record, in words or pictures, the palms and shafts of sunrise as he saw them and imaged them to himself? Can we imagine such a being as this artistic solitary playing to the void without an audience present even to his mind? Is he not a fabulous absurdity, this *Poeta bombinans in vacuo?* I think so, and I think therefore that when we hear a poet saying, however seriously: "It does not matter to me what people think of my poems, I do not care whether people read them or not; I write for myself and not for the public," we are entitled to reply—not, of course, aloud: "Surely you are confusing two acts in one; your emotion was your own, and you expressed it for your own satisfaction, but for whom did you write it, print it, publish it, and send it to be reviewed?" In all this there is an evident inconsistency, and however strongly poets may hold to the theory of their own isolation and independence, you will find few among them who are not in fact moved by this second motive, this desire to have a place, even as artists, in the world of men.

We have, however, one example of the kind, and I recall it here because it is very instructive. Matthew Arnold, in one of the best known of his Essays in Criticism, tells the strange story of Maurice de Guérin, who seems to have approached as nearly as is possible to our imaginary castaway on the Island of Self-expression. "Poetry," we are told, "the poetical instinct, was indeed the basis of his nature; but to say this absolutely is not quite enough." He loved Nature, but not social life; so that "one aspect of

poetry fascinated Guérin's imagination and held it prisoner." His outlook was all for the palms and precipices and the shafts of sunrise, and not for men or the sails of men. "The longer I live," he himself wrote, "and the clearer I discern between true and false in society, the more does the inclination to live, not as a savage or a misanthrope, but as a solitary man on the frontiers of society, or the outskirts of the world, gain strength and grow in me. The birds come and go and make nests around our habitations, they are fellow-citizens of our farms and hamlets with us; but they take their flight in a heaven which is boundless, but the hand of God alone gives and measures to them their daily food, but they build their nests in the heart of the thick bushes, or hang them in the height of the trees. So would I too live, hovering round society, and having always at my back a field of liberty vast as the sky." In short, he longed, since he must live with men, to live as a bird lives, with his home and his sphere of activity inaccessible to them, and himself freed even from the power of communicating with them by human speech. Nevertheless, he was a poet: Matthew Arnold deliberately brackets him with Keats, as possessing in an overpowering degree the faculty of interpreting Nature. He says of the two poets: "When they speak of the world, they speak like Adam naming by Divine inspiration the creatures; their expression corresponds with the thing's essential reality." But Keats's expression "has, more than Guérin's, something genial, outward, and sensuous. Guérin has above all a sense of

what there is adorable and secret in the life of Nature; his expression has, therefore, more than Keats's, something mystic, inward, and profound."

In fact, he was wanting in the sense of human fellowship; his expression was perfect, but it was not for others. The result was to give him a very curious and perhaps unique position in the company of the poets. "He lived," we are told, "like a man possessed; with his eye not on his own career, not on the public, not on fame, but on the Isis whose veil he had uplifted. He published nothing." He left a single prose- poem in manuscript, which was published after his death by Madame Sand. Here at last we find consistency: Guérin not only professed, but he clearly believed that self-expression is the whole end of art. "There is more power and beauty," he writes, "in the well-kept secret of oneself and one's thoughts than in the display of a whole heaven that one may have inside one." In this attitude he was confirmed by feelings which are admirable enough in themselves: one was extreme and even painful modesty, another was contempt for "literary adventure." The literary career, as then followed in France, seemed to him "unreal both in its own essence and in the rewards which one seeks from it, and therefore fatally marred by a secret absurdity." This opinion inevitably reminds us of Wordsworth's, which, of course, runs to the opposite extreme: to him, for instance, it seemed providential that he was obliged to return from France in 1792, because if he had stayed and been

killed with his Girondin friends he would have been such a loss to the world—

> Doubtless I should have then made common cause
> With some who perished: haply perished too.
> A poor, mistaken and bewildered offering—
> Should to the breast of Nature have gone back,
> With all my resolutions, all my hopes,
> A Poet only to myself, to men
> Useless——

This passage, it will be seen, assumes precisely the double aspect of poetry which we are discussing. It may perhaps appear so self-conscious as to be in some degree "marred by a secret absurdity," but it is a saner view than Guérin's: it is more in accord with the facts of the artistic life, one of which is the relation between the artist and his audience. The contrary opinion leads us in practice to a train of absurdities; either to that imaginary creature, the solitary artist, who, not being social, is not a man at all, or to the would-be solitary who, by being partly unsocialised, becomes wholly unproductive. And neither of these can figure in our discussion; they may have their own theory of beauty and judge by it infallibly, for themselves, but their feeling cannot give us a definition of beauty because it does not give us anything at all. In a definition of beauty, or of excellence in a work of art, we must take account not only of the artist's self-regarding emotion, but of his sympathetic feeling; if beauty is to be successful expression, it

must be successful expression both internal and external.

I will quote one more poet as a witness to the truth of this. Robert Bridges, in "The Growth of Love," begins the eighth sonnet of the series with these lines:

> For beauty being the best of all we know,
> Sums up the unsearchable and secret aims
> Of Nature, and on joys whose earthly names
> Were never told can form and sense bestow.

Here beauty is hardly defined, but her work is shown to be the summing-up of internal emotions, and the external expression of them by form and sense. In the sixteenth sonnet this process is used as an image of the divine art of creation:

> This world is unto God a work of art
> Of which the unaccomplish'd heavenly plan
> Is hid in life within the creature's heart,
> And for perfection looketh unto man.

The divine intuition is to be externalised in Man, and Man, the work of art, is himself, by a mystical paradox, made responsible for the perfecting of the Creator's expression.

Lastly, in the twenty-sixth sonnet the whole process is described as consisting of the three "joys of making"—the original joy of the internal expression, the longer and often laborious joy with which the artist translates this into an external form, and, thirdly, the sympathetic joy of witnessing the effect upon the world of men.

The work is done, and from the fingers fall
The blood-warm tools that brought the labour thro':
The tasking eye that over-runneth all
Rests, and affirms there is no more to do.
Now the third joy of making, the sweet flower
Of blessèd work bloometh in godlike spirit;
Which whoso plucketh holdeth for an hour
The shrivelling vanity of Mortal merit.
And thou, my perfect work, thou 'rt of to-day;
To-morrow a poor and alien thing wilt be,
True only should the swift life stand at stay:
Therefore farewell, nor look to bide with me.
Go find thy friends, if there be one to love thee;
Casting thee forth, my child, I rise above thee.

This particular poet, with his double sense of truth and humour, knows that the maker cannot rest long on any work of his. What is for him a perfect self-expression to-day will be to-morrow a poor thing and no longer his own; the swift life will have left it behind; and will have left, too, the hour of sympathetic recognition. But the value of that recognition is not denied: it is a vanity, since it is mortal and must shrivel; but it is, while it is plucked and held, "the sweet flower of blessèd work." Without it the work would not have achieved beauty, in the full sense which beauty must bear for men.

It is here that we come back to our track and find Croce waiting for us. He has foreseen that we may take this line and fears that he may find it more difficult to despise than some other by-paths. "Another less vulgar current of thought," he says, "considers æsthetic to be the science of the *sympathetic*, of that

with which we sympathise, which attracts, rejoices, gives us pleasure, and excites admiration. . . . In ordinary language there is sometimes a feeling of repugnance at calling an expression beautiful which is not an expression of the sympathetic. Hence the continual contrast between the point of view of the æsthetician or of the art critic and that of the ordinary person, who cannot succeed in persuading himself that the image of pain and of turpitude can be beautiful, or at least can be beautiful with as much right as the pleasing and the good."

Every one must have recognised this contrast: Croce has stated it clearly, and has thus made plain the issue between his own theory and that which I am proposing. He defines beauty as successful expression by the artist to himself; I ask to be allowed to define it as successful expression by the artist to himself and his fellow-men. Ugliness, to him, is unsuccessful expression by the artist to himself; for me it includes both that and any expression which, however satisfactory to the artist himself, is revolting to his fellow-men.

It is this which Croce denounces as "the science of the sympathetic" or "æsthetic hedonism," and his argument against it is as follows: the sympathetic "is a complex fact, resulting from a constant element, the æsthetic element of re-presentation, and from a variable element, the pleasing in its infinite forms, arising from all the various classes of values." You cannot, he goes on to contend, include these two elements in one science, for, as we see, they are sometimes op-

posed to one another, and when they are not opposed they form a complex fact. Nor can you set up two different sciences of the beautiful, one of self-expression and one of the sympathetic, for in case of conflict one of the two must be predominant, and you will end by deciding the question of beauty either by success of self-expression or by considering the sympathetic feelings of the audience, which, he says, are essentially hedonistic facts. In plainer, or at any rate commoner, language, what the artist desires of his work is that it shall give him the satisfaction of truth to his own vision; what the audience desire of it is that it shall please their senses. If it happens to fulfil both these desires that will be merely by chance; if it happens to satisfy the artist only and disgust the audience, it is none the less beautiful; if it pleases the audience and not the artist, then it is unsuccessful expression and therefore ugly.

This theory is not only, as Croce admits, unlikely to persuade the ordinary person; it can, I believe, be shown to be unscientific—it does not take account of the facts. It assumes two things: that the artist as such is completely unaffected by his fellow-men, and that these fellow-men have only one legitimate way open to them of judging of the beauty of a work of art—they must not consult their own natural feelings, for that would be to follow pleasure and not beauty, but they must surrender their own point of view entirely and adopt that of the artist.

Let us take the second of these assumptions first. There was a time undoubtedly when criticism did not

sufficiently consider the artist's aim, but insisted on judging solely by the result on a partially sympathetic audience. But the trend of criticism is now the other way; the artist's aim is generally put first, and the critic not infrequently hints that anyone who does not regard that aim with respectful sympathy is no better than a Philistine. But this is an assumption which neither artist nor art critic has any right to make. It leaves out of account the fact that there are or may be artists with whose personality, with whose intuitions, with whose self-expression we are at variance, and with good reason. I am not now thinking of the police magistrate who will condemn a book or a picture if it conflicts with the law of public morality which he administers; I am speaking of a real variance, a fundamental difference of feeling. For we must not forget that it is feeling which is the secret of artistic expression, and no one has stated this more emphatically than Croce; his first chapter shows that intuition and expression are one and the same thing. Let me then put this question to him: A work of art may be a perfect expression of the maker's feeling, but what if that feeling be a cruel, a cynical, a frivolous, or an insane feeling?

It is no imaginary case. No one has ever questioned, or will ever question, the genius of Swift; but to sympathise with all his intuitions in prose or verse is impossible, for some of them insult and degrade human nature itself. The present war has furnished us with examples even more striking. Lissauer's notorious Hymn of Hate is obviously a successful

expression of feeling, and large numbers of his countrymen have found it congenial; to the rest of mankind it appears either revolting or pitiable, according as they take the author to be cruel or insane. The ordinary person is often right in these cases; he reads a poem or stands before a picture, and he knows that the artist has succeeded in expressing himself; he may even feel that it is a wonderful thing to be so able to express an absolutely personal vision; but he knows also that the vision is the vision of a base or corrupted personality. Moreover, he knows that the converse of this is true—that in the work of certain other artists there is a sympathetic quality which comes not only from their success in expression, but from the nature of the intuitions they express. Not from the subject of their feelings, but from the feeling itself. Milton, too, we may remember, wrote a Hymn of Hate, and began it with a word as terrible as hate itself:

> Avenge, O Lord, Thy slaughtered saints whose bones
> Lie scattered on the Alpine mountains cold;
> Even them, who kept Thy truth so pure of old,
> When all our fathers worshipped stocks and stones.
> Forget not: in Thy book record their groans,
> Who were Thy sheep, and in their ancient fold
> Slain by the bloody Piemontese that rolled
> Mother with infant down the rocks. . . .

This is undeniably vindictive and violent; but it is the cry of a great spirit, not of an angry and ferocious ape. It has at least the possibility of being sympa-

thetically received by sane human beings, and that, too, in spite of the pain conveyed by it.

Here we touch on another and very important point at which Croce's theory is not in accord with the facts. Those artistic expressions which are sympathetic to the great majority of men are not pleasurable as Croce assumes; they convey emotion, but it is often painful emotion. Yet the sense of beauty is none the less present in a high degree. Among the countless intuitions of love which have been expressed in verse, only some are joyful, and of these but few are beautiful. The most beautiful are nearly always full of pain; and this is in accord with the natural history of Love, who must have separation always either before him or behind him. Rossetti has sung of both sorrows:

O love, my love! if I no more should see
Thyself, nor on the earth the shadow of thee,
Nor image of thine eyes in any spring,—
How then should sound upon Life's darkening slope
The ground-whirl of the perished leaves of Hope,
The wind of Death's imperishable wing?

Afterwards he looks back to the day when he painted his lady's picture:

And as I wrought, while all above
And all around was fragrant air,
In the sick burden of my love
It seemed each sun-thrilled blossom there
Beat like a heart among the leaves.
O heart that never beats nor heaves,
In that one darkness lying still,
What now to thee my love's great will
Or the fine web the sunshine weaves?

It is not pleasure that the poet gives his hearers by such a cry as this—whatever beauty we might perceive and enjoy in the perfection of the expression is merged and almost overlooked in the sympathetic feeling, the sense of union in love and sorrow. It is natural and inevitable that this should be so, for the sympathetic feeling is wider and deeper than the æsthetic; the grief and consolation which it gives us are derived from a sense of union not with this man only, but with all men, crying passionately not for this love only, but for all loves dead and gone. So with the poet, too, on his side; his own grief is over, his dust, too, has long been "in that one darkness lying still," but the same shadow is waiting for every human love to the end of time; and the immortality of the poem is determined by the poet's gift of bringing this to the minds of his hearers, of carrying it into the universal heart. If in this effort for self-expression he is unconscious or only faintly conscious of this further aim, that does not alter my belief; for I am convinced that the supreme artistic power is the power of drawing upon a spirit which lies below the separate personality, a fellowship which is not limited by the material form of life.

For those who believe this there remains only one question to be answered. If the artist is, on the one hand, seeking for self-expression, and, on the other, for a sympathetic communion with his fellows, if the poet in making his poem for himself is also in touch with all the world, past, present, and to come, what is the criterion of success in this complex activity,

what is the definition of beauty which will cover both sides of it? I do not presume to dogmatise upon this; I am content to protest against the shutting of doors and windows, the confinement of beauty within the narrow, dark walls of the individual consciousness. Art, let us agree, is the expression of our intuitions, an activity of the human spirit; springing from and appealing to sympathetic feeling in others. We shall not give a complete account of it until we have made a more scientific observation of that spirit. In the meantime let me hazard my own hypothesis. That which moves the spirit to activity, that which the artist strives to satisfy and all men share and are moved by according to their capacity, is the desire of life. That which in the intuitions of an artist or an ordinary man is base, feeble, frivolous, or insane, is deficient in the sense of life; that which is cruel, cynical, selfish, or inhuman, is antagonistic to it. On the other hand the lines or colours of a picture, the harmonies of music, the magical phrases or rhythms of a poem, which alone stir the human spirit deeply, are those which so remind us of life, and so revive life in us, that whether for pleasure or for pain we may have life more abundantly. In this sense I think it may be said that Beauty is Truth to Life: such Truth is Beauty; and perhaps in this region "that is all we know on earth, and all we need to know."

THE END

DATE DUE
MAY 23
DEC 4
OCT 28
APR 4 1930
NOV 4 1935
OCT 4 1937
APR 29 1940
JUL 25 1941
DEC 28 1942
AUG 18 1952
AUG 5 - 1953
MAY 18 1959
JAN 5 1961
MAY 11 1961
JAN 10 1964
MAR 18 1966
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